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# Oops…They Did It Again: Pop Music Nostalgia, Collective (Re)memory, and Post-Teeny Queer Music Scenes

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# Oops…They Did It Again: Pop Music Nostalgia, Collective (Re)memory, and Post-Teeny Queer Music Scenes

**by**

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# Dedication

To my parents, Chris and Fawn, whose unwavering support has instilled within me the confidence, kindness, and sense of humor to tackle anything my past, present, and future may hold.

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# Abstract

## Oops…They Did It Again: Pop Music Nostalgia, Collective (Re)memory, and Post-Teeny Queer Music Scenes

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This thesis reckons with contemporary trends for early aughts nostalgia to examine the power of collective memory in musical genres and the role of temporality in preserving and deconstructing queer identity. Through intersections of music scene theory, queer temporalities, and cultural memory studies, I argue the collective power and translocal permeation of this scene creates, sustains, and circulates a virtual network of independent music and performance artists. Using textual and discourse analysis, this project explores how this networked music community revises dominant cultural memories of a largely heteronormative moment in popular music history to produce a shared performance language of past sonic, aesthetic, and sartorial references. In merging appropriations and reimaginations of mainstream pop music within queer practices of camp and satire, DIY practices of community-building, and virtual practices of co-production and networked connectivity, this Post-Teeny scene uses (re)memory of pop music's past to structure their contemporary queer and trans positionalities as imaginative embodiments of more inclusive and utopic futures. The case studies of Rina Sawayama, Dorian Electra, and

p1nkstar illustrates this Post-Teeny scene's unique performative negotiations within frameworks of mainstream pop music and networks of physical and virtual queer subcultures. I contend that these artists' dynamic temporal and spatial intersections challenge attendant academic binaries of mainstream and subcultural, as well as displaces the heterocentric cannon of music scene literature, to further queer contributions to popular music scholarship. With the increasing global hybridity and digital connectivity of contemporary music cultures, this thesis asserts the power of queer temporality, queer community-building, and queer performance practice to reformat previous music industry exclusions, suggest interventions in contemporary scholarship, and imagine future potentialities of mainstream popular music culture.

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# Introducing the Post-Teenys: Mainstream (Re)Memories, Subcultural Disruptions, and the Future of Queer Music Scenes

"I just want to go back, back to 1999…sing hit me baby one more time" is the opening chorus of Charli XCX and Troye Sivan's 2018 collaboration that received much media attention mainly due to the young ages of these up-and-coming pop stars.[1] Charli was 26 when the song was released, and Sivan was 23, making them seven and three years old in 1999. As many tweets pointed out, this example is humorous, if not slightly ridiculous in its assumption of the artists' memory and experience of the year 1999. Music critic Sasha Geffen argues, "like a lot of retrospective musings, '1999' is more concerned with the act of remembering than with the specifics of the year it calls up itself".[2] Clearly Charli and Sivan are not eliciting many direct memories from 1999, yet their evocations of sonic and aesthetic characteristics of turn-of-the-century pop music works to construct a reimagined past. As Sivan sings "I know those days are over, but a boy can fantasize about JTT on MTV…when I close my eyes", this cheeky reminiscence of a childhood obsession with teenage heartthrob Jonathan Taylor Thomas inserts a queer subjectivity into this musical backwards glance.[3] Retrospection within this song is not a nostalgia for an idealized time that never existed, but a critical reimagination of the queer potentials of this largely heteronormative moment in bubblegum pop music history. This critical

[1] Charlotte Aitchison, Troye Sivan, and Noonie Bao, "1999," by Brett McLaughlin and Oscar Holter, released October 5, 2018, Charli XCX Feat. Troye Sivan, 2018, MP3.
[2] Sasha Geffen, ""1999" by Charli XCX / Troye Sivan," *Pitchfork*, October 05, 2018, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/tracks/1999/.
[3] Charlotte Aitchison, Troye Sivan, and Noonie Bao, "1999," by Brett McLaughlin and Oscar Holter, released October 5, 2018, Charli XCX Feat. Troye Sivan, 2018, MP3.

imagination through queer(ed) temporalities defines the thematic connections with a very specific group of young, "underground pop" artists.[4]

As the opening act of Taylor Swift's 2018 *Reputation Tour*, Charli XCX utilized her platform to create pop-up after-shows in clubs around the country for artists such as Dorian Electra, Brooke Candy, Kim Petras and Rina Sawayama. These artists do not perform together as a group, yet these concerts work as a new type of musical revue or cabaret of independent artist that have similar taste in music, aesthetics, and content. Heralded by *PAPER* magazine as "Pop's cult leader" Charli XCX has created a platform for pansexual, gender-queer, transgender, lesbian, and gay pop artists that all harken back to specific sonic characteristics of early 2000s pop music in their own unique ways.[5] Sawayama infuses late 90s R&B with characteristics of Japanese Pop (J-POP), Brooke Candy makes techno rap music with BDSM defiance, and Kim Petras embraces brash consumerism with a wink in her version of Y2K teenybopper pop. Brooke Candy's deep bass and disjointed rhythms is perhaps the sonic antithesis of Petras's bright synth pop of catchy melodies, yet these artists often share the billing in lineups of these afterparties due to the queer sensibilities of their work and their shared network of artists within this underground pop movement. While it may be easy to argue that these artists are simply revisiting the music of their adolescence, this type of subcultural collective nostalgia seems far more discursive than some postmodern pastiche.

[4] "Inside Charli XCX's Underground 'Pop 2' Raves," *PAPER*, October 31, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/charli-xcx-pop-2-photos-2615508553.html.
[5] Justin T. Moran, "Charli XCX Is Pop's Cult Leader," *PAPER*, October 31, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/charli-xcx-pop-cult-2616598843.html.

These sonic and aesthetic references do not signal a conservative desire for the past because Charli XCX and her cohort of underground pop artists employ nostalgia in politically charged ways. Charli's most recent release, *Charli* (2019), uses the song "1999" to situate the beginning of this album within this nostalgic reference to pop music's past. The follow-up track "2099" however, takes the autotuned vocal performance, heavy reverb, and synth dance beats of early-aughts artist-producer relationships like Max Martin and Britney Spears and completely subsumes this mode of performance through harsh electronic production and glitch. Whereas melodic bridge and choruses define the earworm qualities of late 90s-early aughts top 40s mainstream pop music, "2099" transforms this inspiration of music from Charli's childhood and recontextualizes this sound within stylistic innovations of contemporary electro-pop music. Through a simultaneous evocation of past, present, and future within the lyrical context and sonic innovations, linear temporality is purposefully disrupted or "queered". Charli and her peers, therefore, offer a critical near-futurism through thematic engagements with questions of identity, digital communities, and postmodernism packaged within glossy and hyper-stylized approaches to production and persona reminiscent of early-aughts Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera. The past is not used as a gimmick but as a critical tool of cultural memory that simultaneously recalls and revises the dominant taste assumptions of hyper-consumerism and pre-packaged personas within teenybopper music. This reevaluation asserts the persistence of these sonic and aesthetic trends to create the productive possibilities of contemporary pop music's innovative future.

This project begins with an anecdote about Charli XCX for a variety of reasons. Charli's cheeky moniker as pop's cult leader is twofold, both in reference to her inner circle of fellow pop musicians as well as a cult following amongst electronic alternative pop music fans. While her work often features conventions of commercial pop songs, her alternative style of production that features heavy glitch and disorienting electronic rhythms often excludes her from mainstream top 40 radio. This tension between the mainstream and underground sound is a point of productive inspiration for Charli. In discussing one of her all-time favorite songs with *Teen Vouge*, Charli claims that Britney Spears's 2007 single "Gimme More" illustrates the work of "a lot of producers that were ahead of their time and using a lot of underground production on obviously somebody who is such a huge mainstream pop artist."[6] This quote highlights the dynamics of temporality in trends of pop music that create the constant fluctuation of cultural understandings of mainstream and 'underground' sonic, aesthetic, and thematic qualities within popular music culture. However, this network of underground pop artists employing sonic, aesthetic, and thematic influences from past mainstream pop artists like Britney Spears to inform their contemporary articulations of queerness illustrates that these strict delineations of mainstream and 'underground' are too simple to understand the intersecting dynamics of power, visibility, and collective memory. Instead, this variety of locally, nationally, and globally recognized musical acts present interesting questions regarding the power of

[6] "Charli XCX Creates The Playlist of Her Life," YouTube (*Teen Vouge*, April 30, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0NEuzO_ntU&t=110s.

memory in musical genres, cultures, and industry while also exploring the role of temporality in preserving and deconstructing queer identity.

This project brings together three bodies of literature to explore the sociopolitical significance of this late 90s/early 2000s trend in pop music in relation to the ambivalence of increasing queer visibility in popular culture. In order to frame my specific project within the study of popular music cultures, I first situate this group of young queer artists as both a continuation and purposeful deviation from previous studies of pop music and queer desire.[7] Engaging with these complicated histories of representation in the mainstream pop music industry, this purposeful use of nostalgia creates a collective (re)memory of a distinct moment in pop music history.[8] Therefore, I incorporate cultural memory studies of popular music to outline how these appropriations of mainstream pop music genres (sonic characteristics, aesthetics, and intertextual references) of the past complicate their use and understanding of subcultural collective memory in the contemporary.[9] This form of collective (re)memory of the past operates to critique the present to imagine a more inclusive, discursive future for queer representation in mainstream musical genres like pop. Queer theories of time serve as my final body of literature, particularly in the ways this group of contemporary queer artist disrupt normative, linear conceptions of time through their performances to imagine an embodied queer futurity.[10]

[7] See: Farmer (2005, Jennex (2013), and Fiske (1997).
[8] Chapter one begins with an explanation of my use of (re)memory that also explains and contextualizes the term's origin in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.
[9] See: Hoeven (2015), Djick (2006), and Bennett & Rogers (2016).
[10] See: Freeman (2011), Halberstam (2005), and Muñoz (2009).

This project illustrates how these artists use the industrial mechanisms and shared cultural language of mainstream pop music to create translocal and virtual spaces of community for a historically marginalized community of queer pop music fans. Through the study of how and why these artists choose to create these spaces of community for their fans, I illuminate strategies that musical artists employ to promote productive, utopic imaginations for the future of queer representation and participation in mainstream pop music. To begin, I outline the significance of my three case studies through their specific appropriation and purposeful queering of early-aughts teenybopper pop music.

## QUEER REVISIONS OF TEENYBOPPER'S PAST AS POST-TEENY FUTURES

Teenybopper as a musical genre and classification of fan behavior has a long history of feminized popular music consumption. Roy Shuker notes that the term began in the late 1950s as a way to sperate mainstream pop music and their subsequent female audiences from masculinized rock cultures.[11] Angela McRobbie unpacks this industry strategy to argue for the historical account of post-war girls' culture that commodifies the "endless flow of young male pop stars" for mass appeal.[12] Norma Coates further relates this industrial construct to the journalistic derision of female rock fans as "groupies" in the 1960s and early 70s that sexualized, infantilized, and discriminated against any feminized form of musical production and consumption.[13] This coded language of inauthenticity and

[11] Roy Shuker, *Key Concepts in Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 1998).
[12] Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 22.
[13] Norma Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and Early 1970s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15, no. 1 (2003): pp. 65-94, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-1598.2003.tb00115.x.

trivialization, Coates argues, remains an enduring signifier of learned femininity and musical consumption that carries into the 1990s and early 2000s music of "girl power" pop politics.[14] This type of commodified youth feminism carries heavy implications and distinct linages within contemporary iterations of popular feminisms; a cultural cycle of which this music scene is acutely aware.

When asked about the increasing global dominance of female-driven pop music as compared to the ubiquitous presence of masculinized rock about fifteen to twenty years ago, Charli XCX responded "the landscape of music has changed so much…pop music used to be seen as a dirty word and now it's not."[15] This statement points to a variety of cultural, technological and industrial shifts within popular music more generally, but also specifically engages with demarcations of genre and gender during the early aughts that continue to frame discussions of musical styles and cultural influence. Genre is important here because artists like Britney Spears and The Spice Girls are cited as key inspirations in several of my case studies, but also because "teenybopper" music has long history of derision as inauthentic, banal, unimaginative, and conformist due to its synergistic relationship with commercial music production and overt marketing strategies aimed at mass appeal.[16] Allison Huber, like many of the artists in this scene of musicians, would argue that this type of mainstream appeal is not implicitly ordinary or normative. Instead,

[14] Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies," 68.
[15] "Charli XCX on Her Techno Song with Grimes and Collaborating with The 1975," *NME* (YouTube, August 23, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX1ElvXDU-4&t=468s.
[16] Sarah Baker, "Teenybop and the Extraordinary Particularities of Mainstream Practice," in *Redefining Mainstream Popular Music*, ed. Sarah Baker, Jodie Taylor, and Andy Bennett (Routledge, 2013), pp. 14-24.

this genre is representative of a specific "space of cultural production and consumption with its own logics, practices, and processes."[17] In treating this mainstream teenybopper genre of the early aughts with specificity, I am able to map the dominant discourses, values, and identities of which these artists are celebrating, criticizing, and transforming.

Further, in using a brief survey of scholarship on teenybopper music as a framework to introduce and discuss how my selected case studies insert their queer and racialized subjectivities within this dominant cultural script, I clarify my multiple utilizations of "queer" within this project as an identity-marker, critical community practice, and ideological action of deconstruction. While this music scene involves artists critically revisiting genres such as late 90s R&B and early 2000s deep house electronic music, among other past styles, my project focuses on Rina Sawayama, Dorian Electra, and p1nkstar that specifically respond to the political and cultural functions of early aughts teenybopper pop music. I argue that the systems of (re)memory and revisions of popular music's past within the work of these three artists represents the critical intervention and interstitial position of this larger music scene between mainstream systems of promotion and underground modes of performance within contemporary popular music culture.

Rina Sawayama specifically engages with her Japanese heritage, UK upbringing, and pansexuality within her lyrics, video work, and self-branding practices to assert that "pop reflects politics".[18] Specifically, Sawayama is concerned about the way that pop

[17] Alison Huber, "Mainstream as Metaphor: Imagining Dominant Culture," in *Redefining Mainstream Popular Music*, ed. Sarah Baker, Andy Bennett, and Jodie Taylor (Routledge, 2013), pp. 3-13, 5.
[18] Justin T. Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6.

music is a distinctly feminized genre and therefore, is imbued with the politics and positionality of women within a song or album's respective moment in culture and history. Whether it be the Spice Girls version of "very early girl power" or the more implicitly political work of Britney Spears and Kylie Minogue, Sawayama aims to "repurpose the bubble gum pop mold…and write about something [explicitly] political."[19][20] I argue that this political urgency has always existed within this feminized bubblegum sonic and aesthetic style and that Sawayama is acting within a continuation of girl power politics in the contemporary. It is through this goal, as well as influences from early 2000s J-POP artists such as Utada Hikaru, that Sawayama creates her uniquely disruptive, hybrid nostalgia. As an independent music artist without the financial backing of a record label, Sawayama uses modeling gigs and product endorsements to subsidize the costs of her tours in North America, Europe, and Asia.[21] It is because of these promotional engagements that Sawayama's relationship to mainstream music industry and press outlets is one of the more solidified within this specific music scene. This synergistic relationship to mainstream systems of promotion makes Sawayama a great case study to understand the way that "queer" operates as a popularized all-inclusive identity marker, or brand, within popular press coverage of her multiple intersections of racial, national, and sexual difference.

It is precisely because of this embrace of an amorphous or decontextualized queerness within popular press coverage that it is important to remember the specific ways

[19] Moran, "Karaoke," 2018.
[20] Alexandra Weiss, "Rina Sawayama Is Not the Asian Britney Spears," *The New York Times*, August 02, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/02/style/rina-sawayama-pop-star.html.
[21] The Candy Shop with Charli XCX, *The Candy Shop with Charli XCX* (Beats 1 Radio, August 8, 2019).

this genre of music has historically privileged straight cisgender girls within its marketing and performance strategies. The role of industry in constructing and constraining a primary demographic of young cisgender female fans within this teenybopper genre also includes the normative regulations of gender performance on both male and female music artists. In her piece, "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands," Gayle Wald connects male teenybopper performances to a specific form of "girlish masculinity" that "constructs male fan desire as homoerotic even as it both shapes and serves the erotic desires of straight girl fans."[22] In doing so, Wald highlights the explicitly heteronormative industrial and cultural understandings of this feminized musical genre that sought to exploit young female fandom while restricting or restraining any nonnormative, or queer, permeation of teenybopper consumption. While all three of my selected case studies illustrate a queered version of this teenybopper genre, Dorian Electra specifically engages with the gendered performance of desire implicated in most forms of mainstream pop music.

Dorian Electra is a gender-fluid and non-binary musical artist whose whimsical approach to camp and gender performativity establishes their signature satirical appropriation and subversive deconstruction of masculine archetypes. Through overexaggerated drag performances of the Wallstreet businessman, the sugar daddy, and the cowboy, Dorian Electra plays with their gender presentation that both critiques and takes pleasure within hyper-masculine frameworks of performance. When asked to

[22] Gayle Wald, "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands," *Genders* 35 (March 1, 2002): pp. 1-39, 4.

describe their music to someone who has never heard of them before, Dorian replied "I'm an artist who's trying to do something a little different with pop music. I see a really cool opportunity in pop right now where it's a lot more open for queer and non-binary artists like me to be visible, and not just destined to be super underground."[23] Here, parody and satire within Dorian's work deconstructs much more than just gendered archetypes, but also functions to disrupt the dominance of heteronormative representations of identity, desire, and subjectivities within mainstream pop music. Sonic and visual references to the past serve a humorous function within Electra's work to construct an absurdist sonic space and musical world that highlights the inherent performativity of gender within culture writ large.

This complicated mix of indulgent pleasure and critique of masculinity also translates to their live performances that reclaim constrained or exploitative homoeroticism illustrated in Backstreet Boys and NSYNC*. On their 2019 *The Flamboyant Tour*, Dorian and two masculine presenting dancers adorned in harnesses and open-chest leotards simulate sex acts within their hyper- choregraphed dances. Further elaborated upon in chapter one, the homoeroticism within this performance distinctly queers binaries of male and female inherent within cultures of monosexism that create heteronormative frameworks of teenybopper desire. Queerness within the context of Electra's work aligns with key works in queer theory that point to the performativity of gender and therefore,

[23] Brian O'Flynn, "Get to Know Dorian Electra, the Liberace of Fantasy Pop Music," *Dazed*, April 25, 2019, https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/44167/1/dorian-electra-new-song-video-flamboyant-interview.

exposes the inherent artificiality and social construction of sexual and gender binaries. The eroticism of their work exaggerates idealized tropes of normative desire to satirize binary distinctions of male artists and female consumer, heterosexual agency and homosexual restraint, and masculine performances of feminine pop music. Queer within the context of Dorian Electra's work is a sensibility that articulates a specific disruption of normativity to challenge the various structures of power that construct these dominant organizations of society.

Much of the academic literature on teenybopper as genre and commercial demographic centralizes the perspectives of industry professionals such as music journalists or cultural critics at the cost of critically evaluating the agency of these young girls within this specific music culture. By pointing to the shared solidarity of girls' pre-teen identity and the critical "process of girls' cultural and gendered becoming" exercised through these relationships to teenybopper music culture of the 1900s and early aughts, however, Sarah Baker argues for the assertion of agency and meaning-making in theses mainstream fandoms.[24] Scholars such as Mary Kearney and Angela McRobbie similarly reclaim narratives of girls' culture from sexist derisions of this form of identity work and critical engagement with media, but little academic work addresses the role of queer youth and fandom within this mainstream teenybopper genre.[25] These studies only consider heterosexual dynamics of desire through the implication that the majority of this genre's target demographic is white, middle-class, suburban, cisgender, straight girls. Local

[24] Baker, "Teenybop and the Extraordinary," 23.
[25] See: Kearney (1997) and McRobbie (2000).

performance artist, p1nkstar, specifically addresses these assumptions of class, race, gender, and sexuality within her reimagined teenybopper new media work and live performances.

As explained on her digital fan club Patreon page, p1nkstar is a transfeminine performance artist based in Austin, TX whose work "utilizes queered aesthetics of cuteness and pop music to celebrate trans/genderqueer/femme and Latinx identities and propose alternative hierarchies of power and desire than those prescribed by a hegemonic Western society."[26] Pop music as genre and form creates both a theoretical space and sonic language of queer and trans* possibility, but also carries past histories of exclusion and commodification that she seeks to disrupt. As a performance artist, community activist, and DJ, p1nkstar operates within a local network of queer artists within Austin to create, promote, and circulate queer spaces of community. Within the context of p1nkstar's work, queerness evokes a history of exclusion and discrimination that prompts a specific form of activism and community-building. Her participation and cultivation of a local music scene is a part of a long history of queer "artivism" and DIY ethos that creates communities for the outcasts of both mainstream heteronormative society and assimilationist homonormative gay and lesbians.[27] p1nkstar's networked position within this larger music scene is not necessarily a direct deviation form past studies of DIY queer music subcultures in that her connections with artivist in San Francisco and Miami allows her to perform

[26] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar.
[27] See: Warner (1999), Duggan (2002), and Nault (2018b).

across the country. However, the digital methods of connectivity and networked community of the fans of this larger scene illustrates the need for broader understandings of the permeations of DIY performance practice within contemporary popular music culture.

My project engages with the appropriations of this teenybopper genre to challenge the heterosexist taste cultures that view feminized pop as void of agency and critical thought, but also to resist the heteronormative framing of desire and implied whiteness of these studies of the genre. By inserting their queer and distinctly racialized subjectivities within references to past musical styles, these artists assert the presence and importance of their fandom during their youth, but also illustrate the contemporary cultural persistence of this genre to push for discursive and disruptive queerness within mainstream forms. It is due to this scene's specificity of genre and subsequent reconstructions of dominant cultural memories of early aughts teenybopper music that, for the purpose of this thesis project, I refer to this larger collective of artists as the Post-Teeny scene.

While this scene is contingent, ephemeral, and has no official name, Post-Teeny as terminology throughout this thesis helps ground the project within specific references to a distinct moment in popular music history while also evoking a sense of evolution and innovation through a queered temporality. Post-Teeny, therefore, also operates as a tribute to the *post*modern performative deconstructions and imaginative queer futurities implied within the temporal framework of the prefix post-. It is also important to note that the queer temporalities of this Post-Teeny approach to (re)memory differentiates my uses of post- from other terms such as post-racial or post-feminist. The networked world-building

potentials and implicit critique of linearity embedded within Post-Teeny (re)memory obfuscates the implicit liberal progress narrative of the prefix post- as utilized in the terms above to instead challenge the demarcation of marginalized past and inclusive present. In asserting the overlapping and intersecting temporalities of these performative imaginations, this Post-Teeny scene argues that queer and feminist understandings of cultural memory must reckon with the ways in which experiences of the past and possibilities of the future continue to structure contemporary states of identity and community. The Post-Teenys, therefore, queerly speak through and are inspired by this absence from the dominant cultural memories of the early aughts to form their own spaces, networks, and performative imaginations.

### NOT JUST QUEENS AND PUNKS

In a similar way that teenybopper literature focuses on the targeted demographic of cisgender heterosexual white girls, the study of queer desire and mainstream popular music historically centers cisgender homosexual white men as the representative sample. Academic studies on queer music subcultures however, in an effort to be attuned to the anti-assimilationist politics of their subjects, deliberately rejects dominant cultural frameworks of demographics perpetuated by industry constructs of genre. In an effort to explore these academic tensions and to articulate my project's specific intervention within these disparate frameworks of queerness and popular music, I turn to the study of punk music subcultures.

In utilizing and complicating two very contradictory genres of music during the 1990s, queercore and teenybopper, this project situates itself within a specific moment in popular music history. Using the history of punk music to frame tensions within the academic study of queer community, identity, and popular music, I position this music scene as a unique intersection of independent DIY musical practice within a mainstream pop music genre that is largely representative of the shifting popular music landscape in the digital age. I argue this underground music scene employs a variety of subcultural community-building practices, DIY modes of performance, and synergistic interactions with mainstream popular press to embrace their interstitial position in the music industry as a push for radical queer subjectivities within the dominant public sphere. This project begins to reckon with these shifts in popular music culture through the selection of a specific queer music scene that complicates previous binaries of subcultural queer musics, such as queercore or riot dykes, and mainstream expressions of queer desire such as gay male diva studies.

Diva studies, a dominant framework of queer fandom and popular music, illustrates the emancipatory effect of pop performance and gay male fandom.[28] In his 1989 book *Reading the Popular,* John Fiske explores the affective experience of pop music excess from the perspective of young female fans. This performance of excess "overspills ideological control and offers a scope for resistance" in which young female fans utilize to make their own signifiers that mock and challenge the hegemonic meanings implicit within

[28] Craig Jennex, "Diva Worship and the Sonic Search for Queer Utopia," *Popular Music and Society* 36, no. 3 (2013): pp. 343-59, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.798544, 344.

the commodification of female bodies with dominant patriarchy of the popular music industry.[29] Brett Farmer's seminal essay "The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship" uses Fiske's discussions of pop performance excess and discursive identity exploration to argue that diva worship expresses a "queer sublimity" in which gay males are able to "negotiate spaces of self-affirmation in the face of a hostile environment."[30] Farmer also connects pivotal queer theories such as José Muñoz's "disidentifications," Lee Edelman's "double operation" and Eve Sedgwick's "reparative" queer culture that frame future discussions of the potentialities of queer desire articulated through popular media.[31] These textual approaches to understanding the affective relationship between spectacular pop music performance and queer identity serves as one of the primary ways I understand the cultural intervention of this contemporary music scene. Similar to dominant frameworks that understand teenybopper music only within heteronormative desire, however, Fiske's and Farmer's approach to queer desire only seeks to understand the homosexual male expressions of fandom surrounding cisgender women.[32]

This project expands this framing of queer fandom and mainstream pop music to account for what Alexander Doty describes as "even less analyzed queer readership positions [that] form around the nexus of race and sexuality, or class and sexuality…or

[29] John Fiske, "Madonna," in *Reading the Popular* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp: 77-92, 85.
[30] Brett Farmer, "The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005): pp. 167,170, https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-20-2_59-165, 167,170.
[31] Brett Farmer, "The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship," 167, 181, 184.
[32] See: Moore (2012) and Kooijman (2018) for work on diva figures such as Tina Turner and Beyoncé that challenge these dominant frameworks to account for race and the discriminatory regulations of these classifications on star texts of women of color.

some combination of gender race/class/ethnicity and sexuality."[33] These intersections of identity, however, are also the reasons why studies of queer production and reception practices in popular music are often framed within a subcultural binary. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) developed subcultural studies through an analysis of working-class politics and youth identities. In his work on 1970s UK punk culture, Dick Hebdige argues that this rebellion carries a specific set of aesthetics and styles that represent appropriations of consumer goods as processes of rewriting their intended cultural and political meanings.[34] This process of bricolage becomes a dominant way of understanding collective uses of aesthetics and musical styles that when combined with the lived reality of exclusion, discrimination, and outrage, forms a subculture or subcultural way of being outside of the dominant, or mainstream, society. Hedbige's work on punk culture, albeit masculinist, illustrates why any form of queer production or consumption warrants an oppositional, or subculture, understanding of reactions to dominant power structures. Whereas white gay men of the 1980s and 1990s were able to access and perform discursive identity practices through their own readings of camp and spectacle of mainstream female icons, there are layers of economic, racial, and gender privilege that enable this form of gayness as the most visible, and therefore dominant, queer consumption practice in popular culture. In this way, studies of queercore, dykecore, and homo-hop seek to highlight how "queer modalities of stylistic resistance, subcultural identification and

[33] Alexander Doty, "Introduction: There's Something about Mary," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 22, no. 2 (2007): pp. 1-9, https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-2007-001), 7.
[34] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

musicalised social action" challenge the regulatory power dynamics of heteronormative mainstream popular music culture.[35]

The robust field of queer music subcultures, therefore, illustrates how patriarchal and misogynist mainstream music industry prompts collective articulations of queer style and subjectivities to define themselves in stark opposition to commercialized forms of promotion. This outward rejection of capitalist power structures is inherent within anti-assimilation politics, a politically informed rejection of commodified recuperation or appropriation of their unique modes of performance. For this reason, Do-It-Yourself (D.I.Y.) musical practices constitutes a prevailing ethos in which queer music cultures are studied and understood. In "The Missing Links", Mary Celeste Kearney understands the lesbian-folk movement of the 1960s/70s as a key moment in queer popular music history due to the establishment of feminist record label Olivia Records.[36] While she is careful to not overstate the origin of leftist D.I.Y. practice within this moment, it is important to note that feminist framings of labor in musical practice informs much of the radical queering of punk in queercore and lesbian participation in riot grrrl, known as riot dykes. Operating in these amateur modes of production allows for a low barrier for participation, agency in self-creations, and increased communal sharing between audience and artist. This democratization of musical participation is why Curran Nault argues in his study of queercore that "D.I.Y. is not just a creative practice but a sociopolitical lifeline for women,

[35] Jodie Taylor, "Claiming Queer Territory in the Study of Subcultures and Popular Music," *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 3 (2013): pp. 194-207, https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12021, 200.
[36] Mary Celeste Kearney, "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl - Feminism - Lesbian Culture," in *Sexing the Grove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Shelia Whiteley (Routledge, 1997), pp. 207-229, 219.

queers, people of color, and all those that dominant forces attempt to keep disenfranchised."[37] This quote highlights the power of queer music in practice, the way that queer as a form of reading and performing serves to address and reshape the lived reality of marginalization in a society governed by heteronormative expectations and discriminatory institutions of power. Whereas my selected case studies utilize the structures of power implicated in the mainstream teenybopper genre, their independent role within the music industry or D.I.Y. mode of performance still informs their transformation of music commodities and critical lens of inter-community dynamics of power and visibility. This Post-Teeny scene's centralization of femme and trans people of color through independent relationships to industry and D.I.Y. networking of local and translocal performance artists aligns with the practices of previous studies of queer subcultures. However, this music scene illustrates a more complicated relationship to mainstream pop music culture, particularly in their synergistic relationship to industry strategies of promotion.

These Post-Teeny music artists operate within mainstream genres of teenybopper pop, R&B, rap, and electronic music that illustrates the complex realities of identity, politics, music-making, and consumption in the twenty-first century. In a market where streaming platforms presents much wider accessibility of a much larger catalogue of music, social media platforms allow endless navigation of music cultures for fans and new forms of self-promotion for the artists. Genres still operate as dominant framings of musical

[37] Curran Nault, *Queercore: Queer Punk Media Subculture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 15.

consumption and marketing practice, but the ease at which artists and consumers span these stylistic boundaries prompts frameworks of music cultures that also considers the fluidity of virtual space and traversable musical place. While the work of queer music subcultures informs the political urgency and independent D.I.Y. practices of these musical artists, music scene theory accounts for the various ways digital technologies disrupt strict boundaries of physical space that define subcultural participation. It is through engagement with social media and normative modes of artist self-promotion that highlights this specific music scene's role within the ambivalence of increasing queer visibility. The low barrier of entry and complete autonomy of digital fan engagement for independent artists on social media allows for a further legitimization of queerness within increasingly normative modes of music industry promotion, but the precarity of these strategies creates a tension that threatens to subsume or sanitize the discursive queerness of an artists' work or persona within the commercial sphere.

Birthed out of an impetus to account for this shifting landscape of global ownership trends within the cultural industries in the late 80s to early 90s, Will Straw developed music scene theory to address the lack of uniformity of local music communities in the coming twenty-first century. Straw's 1991 article, "Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music," specifically responds to the "paradoxical status of localism" that he believes to be dominant in subcultural music studies.[38] While studies such as Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* derive the unique political

[38] Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (1991): pp. 368-388, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389100490311, 378.

significance of a music subculture from the specificities of responses to the local circumstance of that geographic place, Straw argues that these formations of regional or local style offers a blueprint of appropriate behaviors that provide a "trajectory of progress which others will follow."[39] Here, Straw is not disparaging the significance of music subcultures, but seeking a more expansive framework to account for the way that culture and meaning-making becomes reproduced within a variety of local circumstances. Straw, therefore, argues for the development of a theorization of collective participation that can be both fundamentally rooted in local specificities, but also can traverse the physical parameters of space and place to account for the more affective and trans-local qualities of musical style. Whereas studies of musical bricolage focus on the moment of articulation within a specific cultural and industrial context, Straw argues that scene theory can also provide understandings of the way these specific styles evolve over time and space through tracing their "logics of change."[40]

While a survey of literature of teenybopper and girls' culture of the 90s and early aughts provides an outline of the specific modes of articulation that define this group of Post-Teeny contemporary artists, this brief history of punk and queerness illustrates the type of academic dichotomies that define the study of popular music during this moment in time. Here, teenybopper and punk serve as binary frameworks to articulate the tensions of this 90s moment of popular culture and also articulates the specific interventions of my project that points to the need of different frameworks to understand the popular and fluid

[39] Straw, "Systems of Articulation," 378.
[40] Straw, "Systems of Articulation," 368.

permeations of queerness within mainstream contemporary music culture. Here, the post- in Post-Teeny signals a disruption of neat industrial categories of mainstream and subcultural queerness. Instead, this music scene transcends industry-constructed genre categories to embrace a shared queer sensibility of intersectional identity, networked community, and performative deconstruction that points to the evolving nature of contemporary popular music culture. As Straw illustrated in 1991, the rapid transformation of the music industry within the boom of the internet and shifting patterns of global ownership demands a reconceptualization that accounts for both the ways these musical alliances are produced, or articulated, and "the overlapping logics of development of different forms", or logics of change.[41] The development of music scene theory in the early aughts and beyond serve as the primary frameworks in which I understand the activity and networked connectivity of this specific group of contemporary music artists. In addition to moving beyond the heteronormative categorizations of early-aught teenybopper music, the post- in Post-Teeny also indicates a post-subcultural approach to music community formations.

## MUSIC SCENES AND THE DIGITAL CONTEMPORARY

Responding to Straw's formative essay, Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett publish *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* in 2004. The introduction outlines various academic uses of Straw's scene polemic, such as Barry Shank's *Dissonant Identities* and Sarah Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool,* but purposefully deviates to

[41] Straw, "Systems of Articulation," 385.

outline three specific levels of organization and activity within scene theory.[42] Beginning with local scenes, Bennett and Peterson define this "focused social activity that takes place in a delaminated space and over a specific span of time" in which a variety of producers, musicians, and fans create common music taste to distinguish their distinctive style of attire, politics, dancing, and sound.[43] While at face value this description seems similar to definitions of subculture, Peterson and Bennett specifically point to this surface-level understanding of culture to argue that while it may seem like these local clusters are inherently disengaged from the functioning of international music industries, Straw argues that these realities are the result of "interlocking of local tendencies and cyclical transformations within the international music industries."[44] Scene theory, even in its conception of local scenes, does not present itself as a reaction against or distinct rejection of mainstream musical industries, but recognizes that subcultures within these binary framings are becoming less salient as the digitalization of culture facilitates connections of localized and globalized forms of style.

My selection of p1nkstar as a local case study serves to present the local scene within Austin, Texas as one of the primary geographical hubs of this larger, more translocal and virtual music scene. I analyze the political and activist impetus of p1nkstar's work that is heavily influenced by her transmedia storytelling, as the narrativization of her performance practice involving childhood experiences in Mexico, her Latinx heritage, and

[42] Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 4.
[43] Bennett and Peterson, *Music Scenes*, 8.
[44] Straw, "Systems of Articulation," 370.

her position as a Texas-based performance present specific strategies of transnational digital networks and local community building in chapter three. In connecting the thematic and lived reality of local specificity to larger conversations of networked connectivity within the larger music scene, this project attempts to not overstate change at the expense of continuity. Instead, I argue that local scenes still share the specificities of politics and queer community while also informing broader permeations of this music scene illustrated by translocal and virtual frameworks.

Peterson and Bennett define translocal music scenes as a connected system of local scenes that share a similar approach to style, sound, and physical exchange of materials while being a considerable distance apart.[45] While face-to-face interaction is one crucial aspect of the scene-building process, translocal scenes illustrate the affective communities and spaces of connection that transcend the physical. Participation within this broader context is indicated by a shared cultural understanding or language of performance. This is where the shared cultural language of early aughts sonic and aesthetic style come to define participation within the larger network of this scene. This collective cultural (re)memory of the past serves as the primary form of group articulation and participation within these physically disparate local scenes in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Austin, New York City, and many others. In their 2016 book, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers argue one of the most important, albeit least studied, mechanisms of scenic participation is cultural memory. The process of remembering is the "reflexive

[45] Bennett and Peterson, *Music Scenes*, 9.

organization and articulation" of the present lived realities.[46] This Post-Teeny scene illustrates a connected sense of belonging through their critical revisions of pop music's past that serve as a united style of collective participation within a larger translocal music scene.

In a similar way that working-class punks reimagined safety pins and other commercial objects for their own rejection and appropriation of style within their subculture, the collective (re)memory of early aughts teenybopper pop music serves to articulate the present critiques and lived experiences of this group of mostly queer musicians, fans, and producers.[47] Unlike punk's queer movement queercore, however, this Post-Teeny scene does not require a static orientation of sub/dominant relationship to culture. Instead, as Jodie Taylor argues in "Scenes and Sexualities: Queerly reframing the music scenes perspective", both popular music and queer scenes are "unfixed sites of both regulation and resistance."[48] The transitory qualities of translocal scenes, especially ones that articulate queer forms and identities, requires a framework attuned to the "multilayered, shifting and fragmented modes of cultural production and consumption with which queer people engage".[49] Here, practice and form necessitate and constructs membership participation throughout a range of geographic locations to create a large community of similarly minded queer individuals. Starting with the past, chapter one dives

[46] Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.
[47] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).
[48] Jodie Taylor, "Scenes and Sexualities: Queerly Reframing the Music Scenes Perspective," *Continuum* 26, no. 1 (2012): pp. 143-156, https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2011.538471, 2.
[49]Taylor, "Scenes and Sexualities," 10.

further into the intricacies of cultural memory studies and its relationship to queer time through textual analysis of the ways Rina Sawayama and Dorian Electra use their music video work to critique and celebrate early aughts teenybopper music that ultimately represents this shared collective (re)memory.

Participation within a translocal scene can manifest in multiple ways that relies on either the transitory ability of the fan or the networked mobility of the various musicians. Peterson and Bennett understand this process through an example of the Grateful Dead fans who "follow their favorite musicians around the country…and energize local devotees of the music and lifestyle."[50] My project explores this Post-Teeny scene that illustrates a similar energy but is facilitated and organized in slightly different ways. This group of musical artists are constantly performing within the same network of queer bars, performance events, and music venues around various North American cities. Sawayama and Electra have performed in the same lineup with the aforementioned Charli XCX multiple times, both serving as the opening acts for different legs of Charli's 2019 headlining *Charli Tour*. Electra has been the headliner of local events organized by p1nkstar and other local music scenes. Additionally, p1nkstar has also performed in lineup with Charli XCX and Dorian Electra at a party in Dallas, indicating that these artists are not only aware of each other's work but operate in shared queer spaces and modes of performance. While at different levels of industrial recognition and cultural visibility, these artists still network within the same music scene due to their shared performance language

[50] Bennett and Peterson, *Music Scenes*, 10.

of nostalgic Y2K performance and queer sensibility. Chapter two explores the multispatial dynamics of visibility within this translocal Post-Teeny scene through a discourse analysis of popular press profiles of Rina Sawayama to understand the way temporality within popular media constructs and constrains queerness as a universal, all-encompassing identity-based terminology at this specific moment in culture. Space within the context of Chapter two is not physical or venue-based, but representative of how the culture industries rationalizes and positions Sawayama's queer sensibility and identity within the dominant public sphere.

The ways in which this scene of artists organize, participate, and promote each other's work points to the digital networked connectivity of these artists that challenges dominant understands of virtual music scenes as only supplementary to, or flowing out of, physical local and translocal scenes. In Peterson and Bennett's 2004 *Music Scenes* book, virtual scenes were understood as spaces of "electronic communication" such as virtual fan clubs, chat rooms, email listservs, and internet fanzines. The virtual participation of music scenes has always been understood as fan spaces of creativity and intervention. For this reason, Bennett and Rogers argue in their 2016 book that the nature of virtual music scenes is not often studied in isolation, "virtual music scenes are extensions rather than exceptions."[51] This type of bottom-up approach to studying virtual scene participation and community formation speaks to a wide variety of digital music fan studies work, but is still

[51] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, 32.

relatively unexplored in music scene literature.[52] I argue that the uniquely digital nature of this specific music scene is not primarily fan related but comes from a group of musical artists that grew up with the internet as their primarily means of identity exploration and connection to a queer world. This overwhelming sense of techoutopian optimism within the thematic and technological approaches to music practice within this music scene also illustrates the emergent trends in digital fan engagement and methods of independent musical artists promotion that work around, or critically within, the dominant music industry.

Post-Teeny within the context of the digital also signals a future imagination of the virtual potentials of co-production and networked community. This translocal music scene exists *because and through* these digital networks and therefore, any analysis of their work cannot be separated from the processes of mapping and conceptualizing this contemporary music scene. Chapter three illustrates how the Post-Teeny scene's insistence of virtual co-production and networked connectivity requires a reevaluation of the dominant perception within music scene theory that virtual participation is purely supplementary to local and translocal music cultures. Instead, p1nkstar's digital transmedia storytelling represents the ways this shared cultural language of (re)memory for the past is created, sustained, and circulated within a digital network of producers, musicians, and fans within this music scene.

[52] See: Nancy Baym, Daniel Cavicchi, and Norma Coates, "Music Fandom in the Digital Age: A Conversation," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 141-152.

**POP IS THE (QUEER) FUTURE**

Due to the critical role of temporarily within the meaning-making and community-formation processes of this specific Post-Teeny scene, this thesis project is organized in queer approaches to the past, present, and future. In queering the past, I use textual analysis of Rina Sawayama's and Dorian Electra's music video work to examine the various ways these artists revise cultural understandings of early aughts girl power politics and Y2K boy band homoeroticism within contemporary expressions of queer and racial difference. This first chapter incorporates literature on cultural memory and queer time to interrogate the various ways temporality can exercise power over and through queer identity and performance. Through queer meditations on the present, Chapter two uses discourse analysis of popular press profiles of Rina Sawayama to argue that contemporary, popular understandings of queerness as a primarily all-encompassing identity-based terminology is contradictory to future-oriented frameworks in which Sawayama's innovations of pop music style and representations is often situated. These tensions illustrate that while this music scene is often celebratory of mainstream integrations of queer culture, this type of visibly comes at a cost to thematic representations and political potentialities of their work. Chapter three examines the future potentials of virtual music scene theory, networked music technologies, and digital trans*media storytelling through p1nkstar's performance practice and community-building efforts. As a culmination of this project's exploration of the productive tensions between past and present, local and global, reality and imagination, and physical and virtual, the futurist-orientation of this final chapter points to new directions in the disciplinary perspectives of popular music studies and music scene theory,

as well as explores the ways this scene works to queerly reformat the future of mainstream popular music culture.

The conception, interventions, and future possibilities of this project is much indebted to Jose Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Muñoz defines disidentification as a reformulation of the world through a performance of politics that simultaneously works "within and outside of the dominant public sphere".[53] It is through this project that I hope to contribute to academic literature on queerness and popular music by illustrating the interstitial multiplicities in raced and gendered subjectivities, underground taste cultures, and subcultural methods of engagements that often work within and through mainstream pop music. This Post-Teeny music scene rejects the sociocultural and academic dichotomy of queer music consumers as diva queens or riotous punks. Instead, these artists illustrate the complicated "negotiations between desire, identification, and ideology" that create the process and performance of disidentification.[54] I believe this specific music scene is representative of the disidentificatory shifts in queer identity and contemporary mainstream popular music culture more broadly and it is through a project that maps these processes that we can begin to recon with both the productive and reductive implications of these dynamic negotiations of culture. This Post-Teeny scene's discursive illustration of various interwoven and

[53] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.
[54] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 15.

overlapping temporalities purposefully transforms genre, time, and space to create a collective (re)memory to illustrate that pop is the queer future.

## Chapter One: (Re)memoring the Past: The Spaces, Places, and Faces of Post-Teeny Nostalgia Critique

Coined in 1987 by Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, re-memory articulates the shared collective nature of the legacies of slavery. This intangible, affective, and mournful reliving of ancestors' trauma creates a very specific structure of feeling within the present, only furthered by contemporary experiences with historical exclusions and systematic racism. The main character of Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe, will never forget the horror of slavery and so the central paradox of the novel, and its commentary on the black experience, is how to overcome the trauma of slavery when the memory is very much alive.[55] I begin this chapter by explaining the original context of re-memory to differentiate my project's use of (re)memory. I do not intend to co-opt of a term used to describe the specificity of trauma of slavery, or to reduce and flatten the original contribution and use of this re-memory. Instead, I argue for a completely different use signaled by my particular shift in the presentation of the word from Morrison's re-memory to this music scene's (re)memory. While a simple deviation, I wish to align my specific use of (re)memory through the meaning of the prefix re-, or "again." I believe memory, as an evocative strategy and structure of feeling, cannot be separated from the specific (re)signification of this music scene's performative reclamations of early-aughts' pop music past. (Re)memory, as I establish through my literature review of cultural memory studies, operates as a differentiation between nostalgia because it is not a recreation but a "doing memory again." Yes, trauma and historical legacies of marginalization are also evoked in

[55] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

my use of (re)memory, but in "doing memory again" these artists are not tethered by the materiality of the past but operate in an imaginative space of performance. My readings of (re)memory are, therefore, only salient through their operationalization of queer world-building and my alignment of their collective force of enacting queer futurity through shared modes of performance.

I connect these textual readings to their representations of space and networked connectivity to illustrate the way these artists operationalize abstract concepts of queerness and temporality. Borrowing from José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, I use this chapter to illustrate the ways these artists are philosophers in their own right; using the materials and histories of popular culture and their subsequent exclusions or reductions to articulate a politicized reclamation of time and space in a very tangible, embodied way.[56] It is within the work of these artists that dis- and re- operate within their previously understood denotations of "not" and "again", but also, through a queer understanding of temporality and historical marginalization, work in tandem as the cyclical nature of past and present, present and future, and past and future provide both the remembered presence and unforgotten absence of queerness within these performative imaginations. Memory in this way works as constitutive surrogate of previous exclusions, but also the imaginative framework of queerness's future. In "doing" memory again, or (re)memory, these artists assert queerness was always there, structured through its supposed absence from the dominant culture, and it is within this act of "doing memory again" through a specific

[56] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

disidentification with this enforced absence that this Post-Teeny scene creates new and exciting possibilities for queerness within mainstream spaces of popular music culture.

The inherent instability of these referents of pop music's past points to the explicitly postmodern disruptions of this project and to music scene theory as a strategic differentiation from subcultural studies. For this reason, this chapter begins with an account of cultural memory studies as the operationalization, or connective tissue, of music scenes and then further disrupts the modernist assumptions of truth or authentic replicability through feminist and queer accounts of memory and performance. Through a (re)signification of pop music's dominant cultural memory, this Post-Teeny scene disidentifies with a variety of patriarchal, colonial, and essentialist understandings and uses of memory. These artists, therefore, (re)examine the power of the past and historical trajectories of exclusions as an exercise of restraint, subservience, and deliberate marking of impossibility through adherence to previous normalities. There is nothing sub- about this artistic movement and by aligning these artists within music scene theory, I hope to pay homage to the amount of agency that these works have provided me and their dedicated base of fans. In doing so, I highlight the ways textual analysis creates potentiality out of the impossibilities enforced by heteronormative and patriarchal regimes of the past. This methodology brings the performance to the page as a disruption to dominant conceptions of memory through specific examples of queer performance that operate as strategies of identity-formation, community-building, and embodied activism. Performances of queer temporality and the creations of uniquely queer spatiality serve as the theoretical basis for understanding the work of this Post-Teeny scene within the intersections of music scene

scholarship, cultural memory studies, and queer theory. This chapter outlines these theoretical intersections to lay the conceptual groundwork for chapter two's explorations of discursive containment of (re)memory and chapter three's utopic understandings of (re)memory's world-building capacities within the work of this contemporary Post-Teeny scene.

## CULTURAL MEMORY STUDIES AND MUSIC SCENE THEORY

As mentioned in the introduction, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers's *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory* articulate scene theory as a rejection of purely structural accounts of popular music taste that ultimately construct dominant conceptual frameworks of subculture and community. Instead, this conceptual transgression argues that music cultures cannot be constrained or exclusive to physical parameters of space and place but can also transcend these boundaries through the inherently affective and trans-local qualities of music. The maintenance of this trans-locality and affective permeability relies on cultural memory as the collective cohesion of participation. In a brief survey of cultural memory studies, Bennett and Rogers argue that this discipline has begun to map the various ways in which "national and global historical legacies" come to shape cultural identities in the present.[57] The production of this cultural memory, therefore, emerges from "a complex interplay between individuals and the everyday consumption of objects, images and texts that serve to present ideas about the past and its bearing on the present."[58] Very much

[57] Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.
[58] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory,* 2.

concerned with both the historical legacies of this early-aughts moment in teenybopper pop music, but also with the creation of shared cultural understandings through collective revisions of the dominance of heteronormativity within the production and marketing of this genre of popular music, this Post-Teeny scene illustrates a complex interplay of nostalgia, deconstructive performance practice, and community building.

Bennett and Rogers's further assert that this intersection of local practice and global circulation through intricate negotiations of time, space, and place creates the importance of studying music scenes through the valence of cultural memory studies. As "dynamic entities existing over time and serving as a means by which individuals build and articulate shared investments in music, both spatially and temporally," music scenes both create and are a product of the specific cultural landscape of a certain moment in time.[59] I argue, through queer understandings of time and nostalgia as disidentificatory practice with mainstream early-aughts pop music culture, that this Post-Teeny scene's shared investment of music is also a shared investment in a reimagination of previous histories of teenybopper music. This reassertion of the legitimacy and visibility of these queer Post-Teeny artists within the present, therefore, creates the imaginative possibilities of a utopian future of queer music scene participation. Ultimately, the examination of this shared cultural (re)memory facilitates a deeper understanding of the significance of musical scenes as "cultural spaces of collective participation and belonging" that can also serve to critique and reform the popular music landscape of past, present, and future.[60]

[59] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory,* 4.
[60] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory,* 2.

This interconnection of individual modes of performance and personal memories as constitutive of a larger music scene, but also of a collective (re)memory of this moment in popular music history, directly illustrates how personal and community identity often work in conjunction to construct "stories *of* and *about* musical memory."[61] In his article "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory", José van Dijck examines the interrelation between personal and collective memories of popular music to argue that these (re)collective experiences are constructed through narratives of the past. This understanding of memory as "concurrently an individual embodied, technologically enabled, and culturally embedded construction" exemplifies the processes of (re)memory that this Post-Teeny scene is both directly implicated within, but also commenting on, through deliberate aesthetic and sonic references of early-aughts teen pop.[62] The personal experiences of these artists do affect their individual memories of this moment in time, but José Van Dijck argues this personal perspective is a relatively small part of the puzzle when recalling past memories within the present. Instead, internal narratives of a certain moment in time work through and within constructions of popular music culture to constitute new forms of collective memory. This combination of musical signs, internal narratives of personal experiences, and social identity integrate and merge the affective meanings of individual identity-formation into a larger system of collective musical memory. Along with this recall of emotional investments or the affective pasts of

[61] José Van Dijck, "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 5 (2006): pp. 357-374, https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180601046121, 358.
[62] [62] José Van Dijck, "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory," 358.

an individual's experiences, "recorded music may also construct a cognitive framework through which (collectively) constructed meanings are transposed onto individual memory, resulting in an intricate mixture of recall and imagination, of recollections intermingled with extrapolations and myth."[63] Consciously toying with processes of myth and imagination embedded within dominant and normative understandings of sexuality, gender, and desire of early-aughts teenybopper pop, this Post-Teeny scene's backwards glance is not interested in reliving or reviving their previous personal experiences of this time, but deploying a queering of time, space, and memory to collectively (re)signify this moment in popular music history.

José van Dijck's detailed account of how identity and narrative construct collective musical memories establishes the multiple ways in which queerness works to restructure conceptions of the past, particularly through its poststructuralist implications that everyday reality is the product of cultural construction. Returning to Bennett and Rogers's argument that cultural memory is the adhesive material of music scenes, queer approaches to time, space, and memory work as constitutive frameworks in which this group of artists exercise their agency over the historical exclusions and marginalization's of pop music's past. Bennett and Rogers further emphasizes this collective agency through their summation of the primary argument of Andres Huyssen's 2000 article "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia":

> Key to understanding memory as a 'cultural' process is the way in which the past is continually reproduced and re-presented in the present. Memory, then, is something that individuals can collectively 'work on' to produce a

[63] José Van Dijck, "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory," 358.

> particular representation of the past that accords both with their preferred perception of the later and their collective understanding of how particular cultural circumstances in the past have helped to shape the present.[64]

This quote outlines how cultural memory studies creates the connective tissue within this Post-Teeny scene's networked approach and performative (re)signification of the past. Individually, these performers illustrate the various ways their intersections of difference define their relationship to pop music's past and popular culture's present, but collectively this music scene extrapolates these isolated lived experiences to create a shared imagination of the future deeply informed by the sum of each artists' memory of past and each individuals' positionality within the present. To exclusively categorize this collective revision of the memory of early-aughts mainstream pop music as purely critical or primarily deconstructive would be an oversimplification of the ambivalences articulated within these artists' complex mixture of euphoria, desire, and longing for a pop music past of marginalization. To examine the political potential and deconstructive use-values of this shared mode of performance, I turn various academic theorizations of nostalgia.

## NOSTALGIA, POPULAR MUSIC, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Much of the work on popular music culture and cultural memory has pushed back against the assumption that nostalgia is a conservative device of restoring the ideals and ideologies of a bygone era within the contemporary.[65] Through understanding popular music memories as collective narratives of passing time, however, Arno van der Hoeven

[64] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, 38.
[65] See: Davis (1979) and Van der Hoeven (2014)

argues that nostalgic musical performances provide a lens in which to examine the ways that artists within the present give active meaning to the past. This meaning can be both conservative and progressive as, "nostalgia is a way of engaging and coping with sociocultural change, offering people a sense of continuity in their identities by connection past and present cultural practices."[66] Nostalgia as a cultural practice, therefore, is not constrained by any implicit or presumed ideology, but is created through narratives of past constructed by each individual song and performance. For this Post-Teeny scene, nostalgia as performance practice evokes a timeline of previous exclusionary histories to draw conclusions regarding the trajectory of current sociocultural developments that reveal the temporal aspects of identity and the disidentificatory uses of invocations of the past. An exploration of the various implications, or critical use-values, of nostalgia will help ground abstract concepts like narrative and cultural memory within specific discursive frameworks and modes of performative articulations.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym distinguishes between reflective and restorative nostalgia to argue that restorative nostalgia is pre-occupied with the recovery and re-manifestation of authenticity and origin, whereas reflective nostalgia "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time."[67] This pivotal distinction within cultural memory studies works as theoretical springboard for a variety of nostalgia critiques. In "Remembering the popular music of the 1990s: dance

[66] Arno Van Der Hoeven, "Narratives of Popular Music Heritage and Cultural Identity: The Affordances and Constraints of Popular Music Memories," European Journal of Cultural Studies 21, no. 2 (2015): pp. 207-222, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549415609328, 215.
[67] Svetlana Boym, The Future of Nostalgia (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

music and the cultural meanings of decade-based nostalgia", Arno van der Hoeven specifically applies these definitions of restorative and reflective nostalgia to distinguish between ways of remembering within 1990s-themed parties held in mid-2010s Netherlands. He argues that underground, or subcultural, "early-parties" use "DJ-Auteurs" to actively produce new meanings out of the musical remnants of the past, whereas more mainstream "decade-parties" simply replay music from the previous pop charts. Within these frameworks, van der Hoeven argues the "early-parties" create a strong collective identity rooted in restorative nostalgia whereas the musical use-value, or meaning, is determined by the degree of authenticity to which the past is reassembled within that space. "Decades-parties", however, don't pretend to offer any sort of accuracy in depicting the past, but use humor as an ironic reflection on the passing of sonic and aesthetic styles. Yet again, the study of music cultures and collective participation is framed within the binaries of subcultural and mainstream. In explaining how van der Hoeven understands authenticity and subcultural activity as inextricably linked to a self-serious restorative nostalgia, I highlight the ways in which queer critiques of the past create a unique performative context and discursive toolbox for this specific Post-Teeny scene. These transgressive critiques, further queered through playful parodic campiness and flippant humor, illustrates the ways this music scene is neither an iteration of restorative self-serious nostalgia, nor exclusively existent within commercial spaces of mainstream (re)play and postmodern humor that constitutes reflective nostalgia. Neither restorative nor reflective in their use of nostalgia, this Post-Teeny scene's relationship to queerness as identity, deconstructive mode of

performance, and device of community building, warrants a new conceptualization of musical nostalgia rooted in feminist and queer critiques.

## QUEER NOSTALGIA AND ITS SUBSEQUENT TEMPORALITIES

In "Nostalgia Critique", Stuart Tannock argues that nostalgia as a framework of cultural memory can respond to a diversity of personal needs and political desires, especially for individuals whose experiences and memories of marginalization come to construct different understandings, uses, and meanings of the past. Using Raymond Williams's theorization of nostalgia as a "structure of feeling," Tannock recognizes that the nostalgic subject often uses the past to construct "identity, agency, and community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present."[68] In this way, nostalgia cannot be understood as a static or monolithic desire for stable referent of fixed ideology, but must be contextualized within each performer's own positionality that uses the past for play within their contemporary articulations of desires and experiences. Tannock argues that nostalgia cannot be read from frameworks of restorative or reflective nostalgia, as these frameworks reinstate cultural hierarchies of modernism and postmodernism that privileges disciplinary definitions and ultimately excludes marginalized individuals' experiences with the past, particularly those of women, queers, and people of color.

[68] Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): pp. 453-464, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389500490511, 454.

As illustrated through my discussion of Arno van der Hoeven's "Remembering popular music of the 1990s", these inherently patriarchal frameworks also reductively place music cultures within binaries of subcultural authenticity (modernism) and playful consumerism (postmodernism) that fail to capture the inherent nuances of music as political, imaginative, and disruptive. This Post-Teeny scene is not concerned with recreating the past or basing their performance within an authenticity of previous style, neither are these references to pop music's past a flippant tool of ironic commercialism. Instead, these artists present a complex mix of humor, critique, and imaginative practice of contemporary (re)signification built on the backs of the marginalization, but also successes, of their queer ancestors. Any reading of queer positionality and performance of nostalgia, therefore, must examine the negotiations of continuity and discontinuity of dominant cultural memories of the past within each specific performance.[69] In mapping the continuities of dominant discourses of the past and the subsequent discontinuities of contemporary critiques exercised through the articulations of the positionalities of each artist, we uncover the moments of (re)signification that constitute the imaginative possibilities of enacted and embodied futurities.

As mentioned in the introduction, these moments between the continuities of the dominant past and the revisionist discontinuities of the present indicate a disidentificatory practice. José Esteban Muñoz argues disidentifications presents "a third mode of dealing with dominant ideology that neither opts to assimilate with such a structure nor strictly

[69] Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): pp. 453-464, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389500490511.

opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology."[70] In working on and against the dominant marketing and production framework of early-aughts pop music's heteronormative desire, this Post-Teeny scene illustrates the way collective revisions, or (re)memories, work within and through multiple narratives of cultural history, space, and time to create their specific critique. These interwoven and overlapping instances of past, present, and future presents a version of nostalgia that specifically reckons with queer temporality and the deconstructive potentialities of queer performance practice.

While the study of queer temporality is a dynamic and generative field within queer theory, this project focuses on the specific intersections of queer nostalgia, queer time, and queer futurity to outline the operational logic and performative contexts of this Post-Teeny music scene. Each of these intersections explore the affordances and constraints of historical narratives and historiography on (re)memories of queer lives and communities. Gilad Padva, in his book *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*, explores the productive tensions between nostalgia and history that often privileges the latter as fact, while dismissing the practice of collective memory as subjectively optimistic or pessimistic.[71] In this way, nostalgia is often criticized for being manipulative and conservative, "reflecting ideological imperatives rather than facts".[72] These collective memories however, are integral mechanisms of preservation for most communities. As a

[70] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 11.
[71] Gilad Padva, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.
[72] Padva, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*, 6.

reaction to the ephemerality of time, nostalgia becomes centrally concerned with the concept of loss. Loss is particularly pertinent for queer people whose stories do not get told, whose community was traumatized by the AIDS crisis, and who are forced to exist outside of normative conventions of the past. For these reasons, Linda Anderson argues that "nostalgia itself is a form of desire which creates a complex temporality for queer subjects for whom the past offers neither explanation nor origin."[73] As mentioned the introduction of this project, early-aughts mainstream pop offers little to no literal representation of queer desire and as a result, the histories of this mainstream pop music history leaves no room for the queer performer or fan. I am not attempting to conflate the loss of almost an entire generation of queers to the symbolic annihilation of queerness within dominant turn of the century bubblegum pop music, but pointing to the ways that loss is a central structure of feeling for the queer community that, through its pervasiveness in the articulation queer experiences, permeates into a multiplicity of theories and literatures surrounding queer memories of the past. Through critical revisions of this moment of early aughts mainstream pop music, these Post-Teeny artists highlight and critique the history of heteronormative structures of desire implicated in teenybopper as a market and mode of pop music production, while also reinstating, preserving, and upholding a history of DIY queer performance art and resistant music subcultures. This preservationist impulse of queer nostalgia is not exclusively predicated on a historical

[73] Padva, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*, 7.

recovery, however, and can also offer a "reparative reframing of the theoretical and political possibilities of retrospective temporalities."[74]

In "'Between Light and Nowhere': The Queer Politics of Nostalgia", Nishant Shahani describes the experience of "being pulled backwards into a queer past" when listening to the textually and sonically referential early aughts band Antony and the Johnsons.[75] Shahani argues that Antony and the Johnsons's, now Anohni, tradition of paying homage to queer icons of the past creates its own "queer historiography of sorts through its own musical trajectory."[76] This admiration and recitation of queer music's iconographic and sonic past illustrates how a queer nostalgia can create an affective lineage, a queer third space, between past and present where:

> The queer temporality of nostalgia that offers the reparative promise of this middle space. Nostalgia, in this context, as I have pointed out, is not a restorative return to a fixed past. Instead, the ability to forge a space of belonging in the present is predicated on the affective force of the past. In moving backwards, queer history becomes a valuable resource for the reparative process of assembling collective memory as the base materials for imagining a different future.[77]

In Shahani's understanding of Antony and the Johnsons's queer history is the performed embodiment of a lineage of artist-activist that came before. Particularly of interest in my understanding of this contemporary Post-Teeny pop music scene is Shahani reading of a queer historiography that obscures any fixed past to instead argue that the ambiguous and ongoing process of collective memory formation is a community-based reparative process

[74] Nishant Shahani, "'Between Light and Nowhere': The Queer Politics of Nostalgia," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 6 (2013): pp. 1217-1230, https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12085, 1219.
[75] Shahani, "'Between Light and Nowhere': The Queer Politics of Nostalgia," 1220.
[76] Shahani, "'Between Light and Nowhere': The Queer Politics of Nostalgia," 1222.
[77] Shahani, "'Between Light and Nowhere': The Queer Politics of Nostalgia," 1227.

of reckoning with feelings of loss, longing, and sublimated desire. Through a (re)signification of previous queer cultural iconography within a discursive mode of performance, or embodied and enacted queer nostalgia, Antony and the Johnsons create the building blocks for collective musical participation through (re)memories of the past that recalls, transforms, and imagines a queer music historiography.

For a music scene predicated on the (re)memory of a mostly heteronormative moment in pop music history, the citation of queer history is enacted through a preservation of queer modes of performance practice that use glamour, camp, excess, and deviant eroticism to create an embodied textual deconstruction. Building upon academic work that focuses on primarily gay male consumption such as Alexander Doty's camp consumption and Brett Farmer's work on Diva star texts, Antony and the Johnsons also restates, and further queers, the academic histories and understandings of LGBTQ+ audiences and their subsequent transformative reception practices.[78] In queerly paying homage to the icons of this mostly heteronormative moment in pop music culture, the queer nostalgia of this music scene draws a trajectory that exaggerates the absence of queerness in the past to redraw the lines between then and now. A queer historiography of a mainstream pop music trajectory is in a constant state of creation and imagination that, without a stable referent, relies on queer time and a "refusal of linear historicism" to imbue its reiterative importance.[79] The imaginative potential of this Post-Teeny scene's shared approach to citational

[78] See: Doty (2007) and Farmer (2005).
[79] Carolyn Dinshaw et al., "THEORIZING QUEER TEMPORALITIES: A Round Table Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): pp. 177-195, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2006-030, 178.

performances of pop music's past through critical revisions in the present point to both the absences and possibilities of queerness's past, present, and future. Or, as José Esteban Muñoz argues in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, "queerness is not yet here; it is…a potentiality."[80]

Similar to the reparative process discussed in Shahani's discussion of the queer politics of nostalgia, Muñoz argues that engagements and performances of queer temporality opens up the possibility of utopic imaginations of the future. Hope operates as both affect and strategy of survey and analysis, "a critical methodology [that] can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision."[81] Throughout *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz uses this methodology to examine the margins of history to bring light to queer performances, narratives, and experiences so often neglected or rejected by linear, dominant conceptions of cultural memory. By calling into question the marginalities of queers' past, Muñoz follows suit with other queer theorists' understanding of queer time and dominant historical narratives. This history seeks to regulate queer bodies within normative rhythms of repetition, a repetition that solidifies binarized performances of gender and impresses normative patterns of psychic development and maturity that are evaluated by marriage, reproduction, and heteronormative familial structures.[82] According to this Western heteronormative temporal narrative, those who fail to progress within these structures of time are stuck in the past.

[80] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pg. 21.
[81] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 4.
[82] Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2-3 (2007), 161.

Elizabeth Freeman argues this type of "stubborn lingering of pastness…is a hallmark of queer affect."[83] Attempting to decenter queer theory's focus on antirelational approaches, or "romances of the negative," Muñoz argues against an understanding of queer affect as purely stubborn or melancholic to instead propose that stepping out of the linearity of straight time presents a "greater openness to the world"; an excess of feeling that is based within an ideality of hope that is both "distinctly utopian and distinctly queer."[8485]

Hope as critical affect provides Muñoz the raw materials that create the performative contexts of queer utopias through "fringe," or underground, political and cultural production.[86] These productions "offset the tyranny of the heteronormative" by positioning the present "in relation to alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by the presentation of the past and future affective worlds."[87] This intersection of time and geographies through an utopian hermeneutic of hope contrasts Jack Halberstam's discussion of temporality and postmodern geographies in productive ways. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Halberstam articulates how queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities through the imaginative potentials of queer futures that are created outside of normative logics of heterosexual community and "pragmatic markers of life experience" such as birth, reproduction, and marriage.[88] These queer spaces, Halberstam argues, are the "place-making practices of

[83] Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction,"158.
[84] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 7.
[85] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.
[86] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 26.
[87] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 26-27.
[88] J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pg. 2.

postmodernism…[that] also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics."[89] For Halberstam, and this project, postmodernism presents both a "crisis of meaning" and a productive opportunity to "rethink the practices of cultural production, its hierarchies and power dynamics, its tendency to resist or capitulate."[90] This music scene's particularly playful, yet discursive and political, (re)signification of the past is an inherently postmodern practice of performance. These Post-Teeny artists, therefore, present a subversion that through its decontextualized embodiment of aesthetic and sonic modes in the contemporary serves to destabilize and resist dominant ideologies of power, capital, and desire through collective (re)memories of queerness's past, present, and future.

Halberstam's connection of queer time to the affordances of queer space and place creates a productive and generative connection back to Bennett and Rogers' polemics surrounding music scenes and collective memory that also specifically addresses the disciplinary tensions of modernism and postmodernism illustrated in discourses of nostalgia critiques and cultural memory studies. Through an understanding of cultural memory as a collectively constructed narrative of time and space, passed down through cultural institutions upheld by patriarchal and racist ideologies, we can illustrate the ways that queerness rejects and rectifies these exclusions through counterpublics. Here, queerness as poststructuralist performance practice is predicated on the disruption of temporal linearity that systematically oppressed, and continues to oppress, histories of

[89] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, pg. 6.
[90] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, pg. 6.

queer people, art, and community. Within a queer and feminist understanding of the political potentials of nostalgia, this Post-Teeny scene places itself within a legacy of queers that sought to obscure the cultural hierarchies of high and low art, of modernism and postmodern, that formed subcultures as counterpublic responses to discrimination and exclusion. With the changing music industries and the increasingly global reach of niche, underground artists due to the affordances of streaming services and social media, however, these counterpublics now also operate in the postmodern space of the digital. Here, music scene theory presents a new framework to understand the postmodern operational logics of queer space and place in the digital, a type of virtual queer world-building that I will address in chapter three of this project.

It is within this utopian world-building potential that I understand this contemporary Post-Teeny music scene's political and cultural importance. As mentioned within the music scene literature, collective memory operates as the cultural adhesive for geographically disparate trans-local and virtual music communities. Through the (re)signification of pop music's heteronormative past history within the critical positionalities of these artists' performances in the present, the potentiality of a queer future is embodied and enacted. In discussing the specific music videos, live performances, and transmedia work of two of this project's three primary case studies, the remainder of this chapter illustrates how these artists disrupts the tyranny of the present through queer performative negotiations with the past and future. It is within this shared mode of disruptive performance that creates these collective (re)memories that necessitate this scene's community-building potential. I argue that the specific form of (re)memory within

this Post-Teeny scene is a type of nostalgia insofar that the continuous process of historical preservation and (re)imagination creates a certain “structure of feeling”. Yet, the political potential of this affective backwards glance does not rely on the recreation, or even the recitation, of pop music’s early-aughts past, but (re)signifies the material, sonic, and aesthetic language to expand an underground network of queer artists. This Post-Teeny scene shares not only Y2K aesthetic modes of presentation and sound, but also the goals of imagining new potentials for community formation, performance practice, and cultural visibility. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, outlines the specific disidentificatory performance practices and textual (re)significations of teenybopper pop music’s dominant past that constitute the embodied futurities of independent pop musicians Rina Sawayama and Dorian Electra.

## RINA SAWAYAMA’S ORDINARY (GLOBAL) SUPERSTAR

Leading with the concepts of queer temporalities outlined above, Rina Sawayama’s specific utilization of (re)memory necessities another nuance that situates hybridity theory as a critical axis within these already established intersections of scholarship and artistic practice. Similar to music scene theory's academic urgency for subcultural studies to become attuned to systems of global capital and cultural syncretism of the twenty-first century, contemporary hybridity theory examines the "international political economy of subjectivities" that "draws on local and transnational identifications... to generate[s]

historically new mediations."[91] In the introduction of *Performing Hybridity*, an edited collection rooted primarily in performance studies, editors May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink argue that these "new hybrid identities" represent the "proliferations of syncretic cultures [that] has exploded the boundaries of aesthetic and hybridity to the terrain of lived and performed spaces of cultural citizenship."[92] As a UK-raised queer woman of Japanese heritage creating music, performing, and modeling primarily within Western cultural industries, Rina Sawayama is an ideal case study to trace the hybrid negotiations of identity and temporality of this larger music scene. These negotiations of racial and cultural signifiers, or a layering of Japanese-specific context and cultural history through aesthetics, is illustrated across her work such as the music videos for "Cherry,", "Alterlife," and "Cyber Stockholm Syndrome." "Cherry" takes inspiration from Japanese folklore to articulate Sawayama's continuous relationship to Japanese heritage and queerness, the video "Alterlife" doubles as a Karaoke lyric video that exaggerates Sawayama's identity fragmentation through digital representations of alternative selves, and "Cyber Stockholm Syndrome" riffs on early-aughts J-pop music video tropes through her lyrical exploration of anxieties surrounding identity formation in digital spaces.[939495] A consistent trend across her work, it is clear that Sawayama's unique hybrid perspective is

[91] May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink, eds., *Performing Hybridity* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999), 2.
[92] May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink, eds., *Performing Hybridity*, 2.
[93] "Cherry (Official Video)," YouTube video, posted by "Rina Sawayama," September 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wn5YFnrD1u8.
[94] "Alterlife (Official Karaoke Video)," YouTube video, posted by "Rina Sawayama," October 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhf9gkkYaBg
[95] "Cyber Stockholm Syndrome (Official Video)," YouTube video, posted by "The Vinyl Factory," August 30, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKLxvdFtlZE

crucial to her creative explorations that purposefully uses tensions of queerness and race, East and West, and embodied physical and disembodied digital as sites of social struggle. This section of the chapter, however, focuses on the video for "Ordinary Superstar" due to the distinct linkage between past physical club cultures and contemporary digital fandom, as well as the textually rich references to histories of Japanese performance practices. It is through this specific hybrid negotiation that I outline the various moments of (re)signification where a queered temporality presents moments of historical discontinuity, a necessary space for the queer subject to imagine and (re)member the invisible, yet always present, ghosts of queerness's past as well as the potentialities of queers' future.

Discussed at length in chapter two of this project, Rina Sawayama's position within the music industry is deeply interwoven with her modeling and fashion connections. Using her portfolio as the face of various beauty products and fashion campaigns, Sawayama's participations in multiple culture industries often presents funding opportunities and unique collaborations. The music video for "Ordinary Superstar" is perhaps the greatest representation of this industrial leverage, as it is produced and funded by a British magazine called *i-D*. A Vice Media property, *i-D*, has its origin as a fanzine in the 1980 London punk scene. The publication has obviously grown since the pre-digital days and now is a glossy fashion magazine that covers art, clubs, music, film, and "every other creative field."[96] Housed within the *i-D* YouTube channel, the music video's description is not written by Sawayama, but by a representative of the magazine that describes the project as a

[96] "About Us," i-D (*Vice*, August 7, 2017), https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/page/i-d-about-us-en-uk.

collaboration between the *i-D* team, Sawayama, and "fashion pal Nicola Formichetti."[97] This production background is important because it illustrates the unique position of an independent artist of Sawayama's popularity, as someone who can leverage their fashion connections to get funding from publications as well as key creatives in the fashion and art worlds as collaborators, yet does not have the financial backing from a label to release this content herself or even on her own YouTube channel. With over 223,000 views as of February 2020, the "Ordinary Superstar" video is one of her least viewed with the most popular, "Cherry," having over one million views and several others around the 800,000 range. As Sawayama's profile as an artist grew, due to various gigs as the opening act for the UK leg of Charli XCX's most recent 2019-2020 *Charli Tour*, large festival placements across Europe and Latin America, and Pride performances in LA and London, her videos are now released on her own channel indicating an increased ownership over content and funding. This context articulates the transnational context of Sawayama's work, represented in this chapter's textual analysis of the "Ordinary Superstar" video, that is inspired by the lived experiences of her hybrid identity but also articulates the global reach and popularity of her music and celebrity as one of the most recognizable and highly-circulated artists of this Post- Teeny scene.

The YouTube caption description for "Ordinary Superstar" video as well as the *Noisey* article that partnered the video's release on June 6th 2018, point to "Tokyo's '80s

[97] "Ordinary Superstar (Official Video)," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," June 5, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXnxWFKnPJY

club scene" as the key aesthetic and narrative inspiration.[98] The caption continues to remark on how both Sawayama and Formichetti's mothers adored this glamorous time in Japanese nightlife culture.[99] As the child of a Japanese flight attendant and Italian pilot, Formichetti also grew up between Japan and Rome before becoming the primary stylist of Lady Gaga, the artistic director of brands such as Diesel, as well as fashion director for publications such as *Vouge Hommes Japan*. With similar childhood backgrounds of fluctuating between Japan and Europe, both Sawayama and Formichetti have a distinctly hybrid understanding of fashion, art, and culture that is reliant upon their gender presentations, queer sexualities, and racial positionalities within Western culture industries.[100] The UK-production of this music video, through its citations of Japanese performance practices and nightlife cultures, presents a rich textual and paratextual site of enacted, embodied hybridity that represents Sawayama's negotiations as a queer woman of Japanese heritage within Western cultural industries. The aesthetics of sartorial and spatial constructions of Sawayama and Formichetti's partnership within the narrative and thematic frameworks of this music video and its accompanying song, "Ordinary Superstar," presents a site of cultural exchange where identity practices of queerness and hybridity can create "spaces of productivity where identity's fragmentary nature is accepted and negotiated."[101]

[98] Shaad D'Souza, "Rina Sawayama Is Extraordinary in Her 'Ordinary Superstar' Video," *Vice*, June 6, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bj3y58/rina-sawayama-ordinary-superstar-video-2018-watch.
[99] "Ordinary Superstar (Official Video)," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," June 5, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXnxWFKnPJY.
[100] "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.
[101] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 79.

*Noisey*'s Shaad D'Souza describes the sonic characteristics of "Ordinary Superstar" as "a spot in the middle of a 'new jack swing/80s rock/J-pop' venn diagram without inducing any musical whiplash."[102] This song, therefore, follows suit with other tracks on her first EP, *RINA* (2017), with fusion of late-90s R&B vocals that are ramped up with hair metal guitar riffs and an exaggerated drumline and then smoothed over with glossy electronic production. This description also illustrates how various influences from the 80s glam rock to 90s hip-hip to 2000s J-pop and U.S. teenybopper pop come to create the unique sonic and aesthetic register of Sawayama's work. Describing herself as inspired by Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, and Kylie Minogue, but also remarking on the unique resource of late 90s-early 2000s J-pop that consumed her early music library, the permeations of early-aughts pop music cultures across Western and Eastern culture industries find their intersection and hybridized articulation within the contemporary work of Sawayama.[103] Interspersed through my lyrical, aesthetic, and performance-based textual analysis of the video for "Ordinary Superstar," I insert moments of musicological context that help explain the ways Sawayama's work is dynamically referent across a range of aesthic, sonic, and cultural inspirations based within early-aughts teenybopper pop music culture. While other songs may more aptly capture the pure bubblegum sound of Sawayama's work, none of her music videos better articulate her unique and dynamic

[102] Shaad D'Souza, "Rina Sawayama Is Extraordinary in Her 'Ordinary Superstar' Video," *Vice*, June 6, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bj3y58/rina-sawayama-ordinary-superstar-video-2018-watch.
[103] Justin Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, https://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html.

negotiations of gender, sexuality, and race as these various axes of difference relate to the queerly temporal hybridity of her pop music project.

Sonically and narratively similar to Britney Spears's "Lucky" (2000), a self-referential story of her experiences of fame's exploitative hyper-visibility and subsequent loneliness, Sawayama's "Ordinary Superstar" positions her song within a history of self-serious semi-autobiographical reflections on the alienations and struggles of celebrity by mainstream popstars such as Spears. Both of these songs create narratives about a girl's experience being enmeshed in a cycle of visibility and celebrity, as established by both of the songs' beginning voiceovers that speak directly to the listener. Spears's "This is a song about a girl named lucky" is the more literal version of Sawayama's "You know…it's not all that it seems. Underneath it all, we're all human beings," where these similar direct addresses are further connected by the shared beats and bright registers of these sonically analogous songs.[104] Structurally, these songs share the traditional pop song chronology of intro, verse one, pre-chorus, chorus, verse two, chorus, bridge, and final chorus. This tried-and-true structure of mainstream pop music is not what makes these songs significantly related, but further creates the material for their thematic similarities to be extenuated. In a September 2018 interview with *DIY* magazine, Sawayama refers to her inspiration from "the emotion of Britney Spears and Max Martin's early production" and the ways that growing up with this music significantly affected her current music tastes and practices.[105]

[104] Rina Sawayama, "Ordinary Superstar," track 1 on *RINA*, Dirty Hit Records, 2017, MP3.
[105] Rachel Finn, "Ordinary Superstar: Rina Sawayama," *DIY Magazine*, October 25, 2018, https://diymag.com/2018/09/25/ordinary-superstar-rina-sawayama-interview-2018.

"Lucky" is one of the most notorious products of Spears and Martin's production relationship and further supports Sawayama's connection and reference to this text. As the stories of these two girls unfold in the two verses of their respective songs, the listener understands the worldview of the songs' protagonist that create the central tensions of fame and its subsequent exploitations. Whereas Spears's "Isn't she lovely, this Hollywood Girl? She is so lucky, but why does she cry? If there is nothing missing in her life, Why do tears come at night?" frames these experiences as individual, Sawayama's "Ordinary Superstar" resituates this popular autobiographical pop song structure within larger cultural critiques that deconstruct systems of authenticity, labor, and privilege of which the narrative of these songs are built upon.[106] In framing this reference to "Lucky" within a song that explores the false authenticities and exploited labor of micro-celebrity, Sawayama (re)members this key inspiration and early-aughts favorite through a specter of appreciation, but also with a particular sense of self-awareness and textual discursivity that imbues this song with political importance and queer sensibility.

The lyrics of "Ordinary Superstar" explore the dynamics of inauthenticity, aspirational lifestyles, and false intimacies of social media micro-celebrities. Alice E. Marwick defines micro-celebrity as "a state of being famous to a niche group of people, but it is also a behavior: the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention."[107] The title of the song, "Ordinary Superstar," plays directly on

[106] Britney Spears, "Lucky," track 7 on *Oops!... I Did It Again*, Jive Records, 2000, MP3.
[107] Alice E. Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, & Branding in the Social Media Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 114.

Marwick's definition as a mode of celebrity that is predicated on the relatable, yet ultimately hypocritical, constructions of authenticity. With lyrics such as "Girl on the screen, you're a queen. But you're living in a cloud where there's no rain" Sawayama cleverly critiques, but also identifies with, these processes of digital fan engagement through a specifically disidentificatory ambivalence.[108] On first reading, "living in a cloud" obviously is in reference to cloud technologies of data storage by various technology companies and social media platforms. Whereas "cloud where there's no rain" operates in multiple meanings: both as a metaphor for the empty promises of neoliberal individualism that exploits digital labor of micro-celebrities under the guise of self-entrepreneurialism, but also as a metaphor for the affective emptiness or disconnected isolation of false constructions of social media influencer authenticity. Seemingly combining the theses of Alice Marwick's *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, & Branding in the Social Media Age* and Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less From Each Other*, it is clear that Sawayama commentary on digital identities and celebrity culture is not only layered, but also a critical part of the simultaneous knowledge production of performance and academia. The critique within "Ordinary Superstar," however, does not bare the blame exclusively on millionaire YouTube influencers, but also deeply implicates her own self-reflectivity on her methods of identity construction and digital fan engagement. Through this reflection, Sawayama also highlights the ambivalent processes of building community as an independent music artist in the oversaturated

[108] Rina Sawayama, "Ordinary Superstar," track 1 on *RINA*, Dirty Hit Records, 2017, MP3.

streaming music marketplace. For Sawayama, and a lot of this music scene's artists she is in collaboration with, these systems of neoliberal ideology and technological capitalism are the necessary evil for queer community-building in the digital age.

The second verse of Spears's "Lucky" (2000) similarly reflects on the celebrity culture of the time with, "Lost in an Image, in a dream. But there's no one there to wake her up. And the world keeps spinning, and she keeps on winning. But tell me, what happens when it stops?"[109] Thematically, these similarities seem to highlight an individual's struggle with the unanticipated feelings of isolation that accompanies success and industrial notoriety. Sawayama's fluctuation of second to first person in the second repetition of the chorus, however, implicates her listeners within these structures of micro-celebrity's perceived intimacy and digital fan engagement in a way that Spears's focus on the individual does not. Whereas the first chorus of "Ordinary Superstar" repeats "I'm just an ordinary superstar. So far but also hanging where you are. I'm just an ordinary superstar. I'm just like you," the second repetition of the chorus alternates between these first-person statements, adding in "I'm human too" on the downbeat, and "*You're* just an ordinary superstar. So far removed from who *you* really are. *You're* just an ordinary superstar."[110] While a simple, and typical, deviation to create a more dynamic second chorus in a repetitive pop song structure, this rhetorical move ultimately creates an affective link between Sawayama and her audience. Directly calling upon the processes of listening and subsequent following or become a fan of her work, Sawayama argues that there are also

[109] Britney Spears, "Lucky," track 7 on *Oops!... I Did It Again*, Jive Records, 2000, MP3.
[110] Rina Sawayama, "Ordinary Superstar," track 1 on *RINA*, Dirty Hit Records, 2017, MP3.

productive byproducts of community and identity formation that come from these systems of micro-celebrity. In adding “I’m human too” to the downbeat of the second repetition of the chorus, the satire or critique of the beginning of the song is further complicated as not a pure dismissal or condescension, but a dynamic ambivalence to systems of fame, commodity, and digital following that shape her role as a pop musician. Unlike Spears’s “Lucky”, Sawayama’s “Ordinary Superstar” complicates these cycles of celebrity and consumption that both realizes and critiques her positionality within these circuits of late capitalism. Here, Sawayama frames her sonic and thematic referent within this key text teenybopper pop music culture to create a dynamic, interwoven temporality of past and present that argues for community-building as a reaction against both the individualism of Spears’s critique of early aughts celebrity culture, but also as a communal resistance to the neoliberal individualist precarities of contemporary micro-celebrity.

Fig. 1.1. Sawayama’s tweet detailing for her Alone Together concert program

As the track fades out with the repetition of "Don't you want to be ordinary with me?," the conclusion of "Ordinary Superstar" argues that the recognition of the communal potentialities of digital fandom and popular music culture is the way we can work to make a productive space through and within these systems of neoliberal capitalism and entrepreneurial individualism. Further supporting this conclusion, as well as her meditations on digital cultures and their IRL potentials, Sawayama instated the Alone Together program during her 2018 *Ordinary Superstar Tour*. Named after the pivotal text by Sherry Turkle, the Alone Together program seeks to connect fans who attend her concerts alone. As referenced in the tweet below, popular press coverage of the Alone Together program positions it as solving the "problem of going to concerts alone," and a "dismantling of the stigma around going to gigs solo."[111][112] The fourth photo in the carousel of Sawayama's tweet from August 26th, 2018 (Figure 1.1) is a screenshot from the video for "Where U Are" where Sawayama holds Turkle's *Alone Together* as a paratextual reference to song's tensions of isolation and anxiety as prompted through social media engagement.[113] This program illustrates the way Sawayama both comments on these issues of contemporary digitality, but ultimately believes in the power of these virtual spaces to facilitate community and affective connection between a wide range of identities and physical localities. These wristbands, in similar ways to the lyrics and thematic conclusion

[111] Jordan Darville, "Rina Sawayama Solved the Problem of Going to Concerts Alone," *The FADER*, August 28, 2018, https://www.thefader.com/2018/08/28/rina-sawayama-wristbands-alone-together.

[112] Jake Hall, "Pop Stars Are Dismantling the Stigma Around Going to Gigs Solo," *Vice*, October 31, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qv97aw/robyn-secret-gig-app-game-rina-sawayama-alone-together.

[113] Sawayama, Rina, Twitter Post, August 26, 2018, 10:46AM, https://twitter.com/rinasawayama/status/1033742552149766153.

of “Ordinary Superstar”, assert the affective byproducts of online community over the potential pitfalls of micro-celebrity culture while drawing tangible parallels to IRL through specific aesthetic and extra-textual strategies of fan engagement. Connections between physical and digital cultures also serves to contextualize the thematic parallels of micro-celebrity within the lyrics of “Ordinary Superstar” to the visual frameworks of aesthetic and spatial recreations of 80s Japanese nightlife illustrated in the music video.

Framed within this hyper-stylized recreation of Tokyo’s 80s club scene, the introduction of this video tells a simple narrative of Sawayama enjoying a fabulous night of karaoke before hitting the town. The visual framework of glamour and excess of the 80s club scene within lyrics that comment on the contemporary implications of micro-celebrity provides an interesting context for Sawayama’s signature contrasts of embodied race, gender, and sexual identity and disembodied virtual community, understood in the lens of this video within a particular alignment of past club cultures and present digital culture. In the description for Cultures of Soul Record’s “Tokyo Nights: Female J-pop Boogie Funk-1981 to 1988”, describes Tokyo nightlife during “Bubble-era Japan” as

> an endless, extravagant party where personal and corporate wealth soared through the explosion of real estate and stock prices. Scores of young Japanese men and women moved to cities in search of affluence, transforming them into neon wonderlands. Changes in morals, values and gender roles followed suit. Prosperity leads to indulgence, and the taste for nightlife, from flashy restaurants to glitzy discotheques, was unquenchable.[114]

[114] “Tokyo Nights: Female J-Pop Boogie Funk - 1981 to 1988,” Cultures of Soul, n.d., https://culturesofsoul.com/products/tokyo-nights-female-j-pop-boogie-funk-1981-to-1988.

Described with similar ambivalence as Sawayama's lyrical engagements with digital fan engagement and micro-celebrity, this caption articulates 80's Tokyo nightlife within the context of creating identities and shifting ideologies within over-indulgent consumerism and performative excess. These frameworks of wealth and capital trickle down into the subcultural formations and nightlife cultures in similar ways that Sawayama uses digital fan engagement to restructure community formation in contemporary popular music culture. Situating these critiques of micro-celebrity and contemporary digital culture within a visual framework of club culture's past, rooted within Japanese nightlife specificity, Sawayama draws a trajectory between past and present, physical and digital, and East and West. Sawayama argues that the spatial context has shifted, but the same type of concerns of cultural capital, marketable aesthetics, and perceived exclusivity have, and continue to be, the constitutive frameworks of physical club cultures and digital micro-celebrity cultures. In both the context of the video and the lyrics of the song, affective connection and community-building serve as idealist disruptions and productive byproducts of fraught and exclusionary systems of cultural and monetary capital that constitute both club cultures and digital influencer cultures of micro-celebrity. This video therefore (re)signifies the glamourous excesses and performances of celebrity through an embodiment of late 80-early 90s Japanese club cultures that came to inspire so many late 90s-early 2000s JPOP artists, but also set the stage historically for cultures of individualist neoliberalism to drive markers of success and entrepreneurism that defines contemporary micro-celebrity culture. The ambivalences of these frameworks, however, also allow for an agency within

queerness and discursive performance that is illustrated through Sawayama and Formichetti's casting and styling decisions.

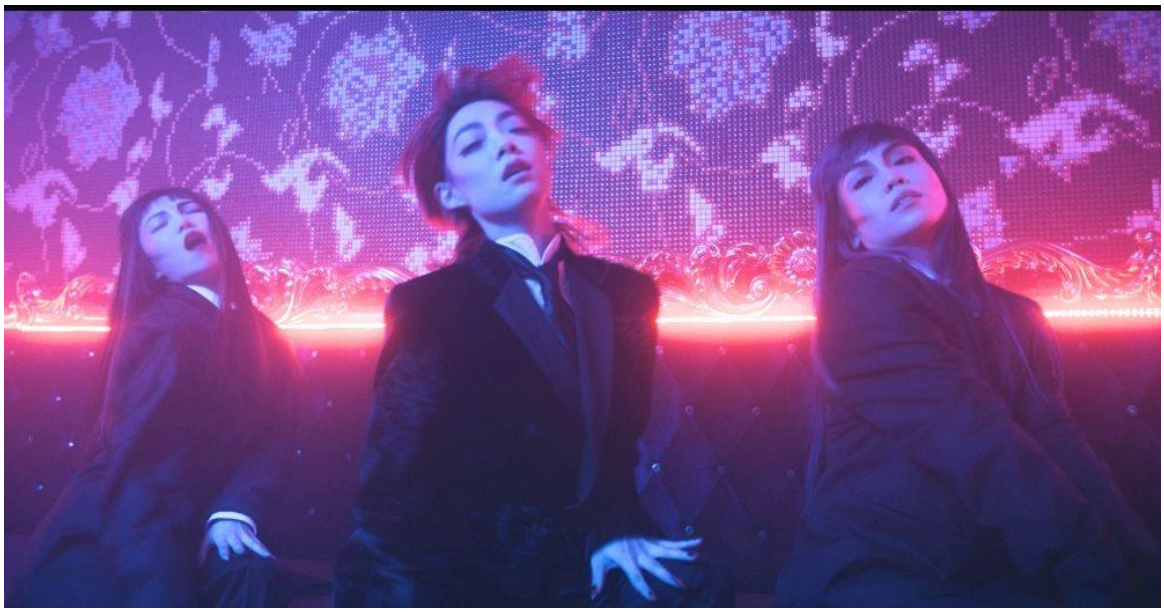

Fig. 1.2. Takarazuka "Ordinary Superstar" example (1:59)

In a *Noisey* article that accompanied the release of the music video for "Ordinary Superstar", Shaad D'Souza explains how one of three of Sawayama's outfits features her in "a suit and pinned up hair, inspired by Takarazuka drag, the all-female counter to Kabuki."[115] D'Souza sources this information from Sawayama's Instagram that promoted the release of the video, which has since been deleted. This characterization of Sawayama's use of this performance practice (Figure 1.2) in the "Ordinary Superstar" video is halfway accurate in its descriptive language and requires a brief historical look at the Takarazuka Revue (Takarazuka kagekidan) in which Sawayama sources her inspiration.[116] Founded in

[115] Shaad D'Souza, "Rina Sawayama Is Extraordinary in Her 'Ordinary Superstar' Video," *Vice*, June 6, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bj3y58/rina-sawayama-ordinary-superstar-video-2018-watch.
[116] "Ordinary Superstar (Official Video)," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," June 5, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXnxWFKnPJY.

1913 by Kobayashi Ichizõ, the Takarazuka Revue began as an all-female performance troupe to attract tourists to Kobayashi's financially failing spa and resort.[117] The show gained prominence from 1914-1930 and is widely regarded as one of the most popular "so-called theatres of the masses" created in the twenty-first century.[118] As an all-female cast, the performances often featured women dressed as male characters and engaging in the mostly romantic narratives of this form of theatre. As this revue gained mainstream popularity, a dramatic academy was formed to teach students these performances of gender where young actors would be sorted and cast based on stereotypical understandings of their believability as male characters such as height, width, pronounced jawlines or cheekbones, and mannerisms.[119] Jennifer Ellen Robertson explains in her 1998 book, *Takarazuka: sexual politics and popular culture in modern Japan*, that these assignments of "secondary gender" was not in any way a subversive embodiment of masculinity or femininity, but a trained technique of storytelling rooted in binary essentialisms of gender and sex. Here, D'Souza's classification of Sawayama's use of this historical theatrical practice as drag flattens both the historical specificities of this theatre form and the contemporary legacies of this Revue, but also attempts to place the enactment of this culturally specific form within Western understandings of performance and gender.

[117] Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[118] Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 5.
[119] Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 12.

Fig. 1.3. *Noisey* thumbnail for "Ordinary Superstar" video

While not drag in the traditional way that Western queer theory, per Judith Butler, has conceptualized its subversions of the iterability of gender performance within everyday life, there is still a distinctly transgressive component of the Takarazuka Revue that becomes further extenuated within contemporary fan practices of this theatricality. Robertson argues that as the Revue becomes increasingly mainstream, and certain performers become celebrities, "some Takarasiennes and their fans used the theatre as a starting point for an opposing strategy, rejecting gender roles associated with the patriarchal household and constructing alternative modes of sexuality."[120] In this way, Takarazuka as a performance practice is much more aligned ideologically with feminist praxis than with any queer or nonnormative performativity. Or, as Lauren Deutsch argues in her profile of contemporary Takarazuka performances in her 2016 article for *The Theatre*

[120] Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 16.

*Times*, this practice "is not gender bending, but gender yoga."[121] This quote is important within its metaphorical signification surrounding the particular use of this theatre practice with Sawayama's "Ordinary Superstar." Figure 1.3, an image created as the thumbnail for the previously mentioned *Nosiey* article, depicts the three different outfits Sawayama fashions in the video for "Ordinary Superstar".[122] What is interesting about this image is the gradient alignment of femininity to masculinity (left to right) as presented in the various aesthetic choices of Sawayama and Formichetti's collaboration. Each of these outfits present a different gender presentation with the center image falling somewhere between these binary poles of femininity and masculinity. Taken within the context of the video's mostly femme-presenting Asian cast, the recitation of this historical gender practice of the Takarazuka Revue begins to be situated within its relationship to Western conceptions of queerness, funneled through Sawayama and Formichetti's hybrid position within Western fashion and music industries. In paying homage to this mode of theatricality, Sawayama (re)signifies the "gender yoga" of the Takarazuka Revue within frameworks of Western "gender bending" that further illustrates the largely Western audience and production perspective of this music video.

These tensions between Sawayama's hybridity are also demonstrated through the contrast of the two performance practices depicted in the video, Takarazuka theatre and Karaoke. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, the furthest left image shows Sawayama performing

[121]Lauren Deutsch, "Takarazuka Revue: Japanese All-Female Musical Theater Troupe," *The Theatre Times,* December 23, 2018, https://thetheatretimes.com/takarazuka-review-japanese-female-musical-theater-troupe/.
[122] Shaad D'Souza, "Rina Sawayama Is Extraordinary in Her 'Ordinary Superstar' Video," *Vice*, June 6, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bj3y58/rina-sawayama-ordinary-superstar-video-2018-watch.

Karaoke and presenting normatively feminine, whereas Figures 1.2 and 1.3 illustrate the ways performances of masculinity counteract and position the center outfit, or look, in Figure 1.2 as the androgynous middle-ground between the two exaggerated binary gender presentations. I argue there is little coincidence that the shots of Karaoke performance, a Japanese technology that is widely used in the West, is presented through Sawayama's most normatively feminine presentation. Often discussing the commodification and essentialism of Eastern femininity within Western cultural industries, Sawayama's normatively girlish performance of Karaoke as contrasted by the specifically Eastern performance of Takarazuka masculinity teases out these tensions of exchange and cultural imperialism.[123][124] However, hybridity theory displaces these assumed hierarchies of power implicit in cultural exchanges of the East and West to argue against a framework of domination that privileges a Western perspective. I understand the semi-androgynous center outfit in Figure 1.3 as a performative embodiment of Sawayama's specific hybridity. In framing the two performance practices of "Ordinary Superstar" within embodiments of femininity and masculinity, Sawayama purposefully draws a contrast that positions this third sartorial construction as this space between male and female, East and West, then and now.

[123] "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.
[124] Chapter two further explores the feminist Asian scholarship that supports these claims such as LeiLani Nishime's *Undercover Asians: Multiracial Asians in American Visual Culture* and Christine Yano's "Flipping Kitty: Transnational Transgressions of Japanese Cute".

Fig. 1.4. "Ordinary Superstar" western cultural imperialism example (2:36)

As the song reaches its climax, or the bridge, the video presents a close-up on Sawayama's face that quickly zooms out to show Sawayama adorned in gold sitting on a throne underneath an ornate painting of white bodies (Figure 1.4). The visual signifiers of this moment at first glance seem to indicate a privileging of whiteness over Sawayama, as indicated by the ornate painting's elevated visual plane, but this intimate encounter with Sawayama's gaze, or direct look into the screen, during this moment indicates that she is the subject and object of this moment in the music video. As she stares directly into the camera, hair slicked back in an ornate gold dress with harsh and exaggerated spike details, this specific moment of performative hybridity seems to question the implicit or assumed power dynamics of Eastern difference and Western whiteness, regulatory masculinity and essentialized femininity, queer exclusionary pasts and the disruptive potentials of the future.

These components of historical trajectory of Japanese theatricality through gender performance, the visual and sartorial framework of 80's Tokyo nightclub, and sonic and thematic influences from early-aughts US teenybopper genre and late 90s J-pop within a UK-produced music video, illustrates the interwoven and concurrent temporalities through Sawayama's performance in "Ordinary Superstar." This music video quintessentially captures what makes Rina unique as an artist. Merging these worlds of digital culture within referential frameworks of early-aughts Britney Spears and Max Martin inspired pop rhythms and sonic structure that also deeply implicates the histories of female Japanese artists that create her specific worldview. Hybridity within this context illustrates the negotiations of sexuality, gender, race, physical/digital space, and temporality, all housed within a *Vice* funded, hyper-glossy pop package. This hybridization of culture destabilizes a single referent of a specific time or place to illustrate the ways that history can both structure and be restructured, or (re)signified, through this queer performance of temporality. The visual and industrial dominant discourses of early-aughts pop music within the work of Sawayama not only responds to a presumed heteronormativity, but also an implicit white and Western perspective.

Identifying with and working through sonic frameworks of U.S. pop musicians like Britney Spears, Sawayama pays homage to a key musical influence but also disidentifies with the industrial framing and visual construction of Spears' desirable whiteness and essentialized western femininity. Instead, (re)signifying practices of Takarazuka within the visual frameworks of recreations of 80s Tokyo club culture, Sawayama imagines "what if" gender transgressions through disruptive performances of sexuality existed within these

mainstream nightlife spaces. It is within this (re)memory of the past through an assertion of her hybrid subjectivity in the present that she allows her audience to imagine future queer potentialities. This conclusion argues that queerness was always there, by the very nature of its purposeful exclusion, and through reconstructing the visuality of these queer pasts, Sawayama creates the politicalized disruption of her hybrid performance that also highlights the ambivalent racialized disidentification with the possibility of future pop music forms.

## ALL QUEERS ARE V.I.PS TO DORIAN ELECTRA

To complicate, or further "queer," my understanding of this Post-Teeny scene's shared mode of discursive gender performance I turn to Dorian Electra. Assigned female at birth, Dorian Electra is a non-binary genderqueer pop music artist who, per their website's "About" page, has "quickly built a dedicated fan base thanks to their futuristic spin on 00s pop, 80s funk, and a long-standing love of satirizing rigid gender roles and views on sexuality."[125] Toying with dominant and normative masculine archetypes, Dorian Electra's music video work serves as a primary site for the intersection of their various distortions of queer vocality, hyper-gendered performances of masculine eroticism, and queer world-building.[126] Dorian specifically utilizes and draws upon a queer linage of camp performance practice to create their signature blend of irreverent humor, satirical appropriation, and subversive deconstruction of figures like the Wallstreet businessman

[125] "DORIAN ELECTRA - About Contact," About Contact, n.d., https://dorianelectra.com/ABOUT.
[126] See: Haven (2019).

("Career Boy"), the sugar daddy ("Daddy Like"), and the cowboy ("Jackpot"). In examining the ways camp performance structures Dorian's live performance practice and queer worldbuilding in their music videos, this section of the chapter outlines the specific ways that Dorian (re)signifies the past as a site of erotic and subversive play that opens up the possibilities of a queer future.

In chapter three, "Camp-A Queer Sensibility," of *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity, and Queer World-Making*, Jodie Taylor briefly traces the historical linages of camp from later nineteenth century literature to Susan Sontag's influential 1964 essay, "Notes on Camp." Taylor claims that camp has received criticisms from academics that argue this mode of performance or aesthetics privileges an association with gay male spectatorship and misogynist appropriations of feminine excess, while others have questioned the efficacy of this sensibility's deconstruction claiming that it enacts more of a recreation or perpetuation of dominant understandings of sexualities and gender.[127] Following suit of Taylor's queer uses of Richard Dyer's 1999 "It's being so camp as keeps us going" and Jack Babuscio's 1999 "The cinema of camp (AKA Camp and the gay sensibility)," I wish to place Dorian Electra's specific mode of performance within a historical trajectory of a sensibility that has long been used to expose process of naturalization of normative gender and sexuality. Dyer argues that camp is a specifically pre-Gay Liberation strategy of resistance, or "a coming out within straight society", that

[127] Jodie Taylor, *Playing It Queer: Popular Music, Identity, and Queer World-Making*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2012, 3.

uses irony to negotiate its minoritarian position within dominant cultures.[128] This similar logic serves as the basis for Muñoz's theories of disidentifications that connects to Sawayama's performance of hybridity. I do not wish to conflate these modes of performance or decontextualize the specifically queer of color critique rooted in Muñoz's *Disidentifications,* yet to illustrate, as Taylor does, the queer potentials of a camp sensibility that seeks to displace subordination through strategic methods of exaggeration and performative hyperbole. Babuscio, therefore, establishes four interwoven features of camp: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor.[129] It is within these categories that I outline Dorian's (re)signification of early-aughts teenybopper desire as well as their specific use of queer world-building through their music video for the song "VIP."

Whereas the sonic and aesthetic characteristics of Sawayama's queer (re)memory of early-aughts teenybopper pop finds most inspiration from Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera, I situate Dorian's "futuristic spin on 00s pop" within their queerly masculine appropriations of what Gayle Wald calls "'girlish' masculinity" of 2000s boybands like *NSNYC and Backstreet Boys.[130] Briefly mentioned in the introduction of this thesis project, Gayle Wald's "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands" examines the ways that a specifically marketable "feminized masculinity" of boybands "constructs male fan desire as homoerotic even as it both shapes and serves the

[128] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).
[129] Jack Babuscio, "The Cinema of Camp (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility)," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: a Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleo (University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 117-135.
[130] Gayle Wald, "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands," *Genders* 35 (March 1, 2002): 1–39.

erotic desires of straight girl fans."[131] As a cultural counter to the relatively transgressive, or "sexy", desires of Britney Spears's articulations of the erotic, Wald argues that boybands of the early aughts were often framed as an alternative in which to imagine a "safer" expression of young female desire. Based within the "heterosexism of dominant culture and its anxious policing of girls' sexual expression," Wald positions this version of feminized masculinity as a market experiment that allowed for expressions of homoeroticism within girls' culture that was ultimately predicated on reinscribing both heteronormative structures of desire, that construct the male fan as abject, as well as placing the power of "girl power" music within its relation to acquiring male attention.[132] The implicit and abjectly marked homoeroticism of these boybands now takes center stage through Dorian Electra's exaggerated performance, and subsequent distortions, of masculinity. As Babuscio's understanding of camp as a gay male response to the naturalization of heterosexuality is predicated on the full recognition of the heterosexist attitudes that produced the need for camp performance in the first place, it is within these dominant frameworks of pop music's past that constitutes the need for Dorian's theatrically erotic masculinity within aesthetic and sonic characteristics of teenybopper pop music. Electra, therefore, displaces the stability of a male referent within this homoerotic framework to reconstitute the heterosexist power dynamic of histories of boyband desire through disruptive performances of unabashed queer kink sexuality.

[131] Wald, "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands,", 4.
[132] Wald, "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands,", 7, 19.

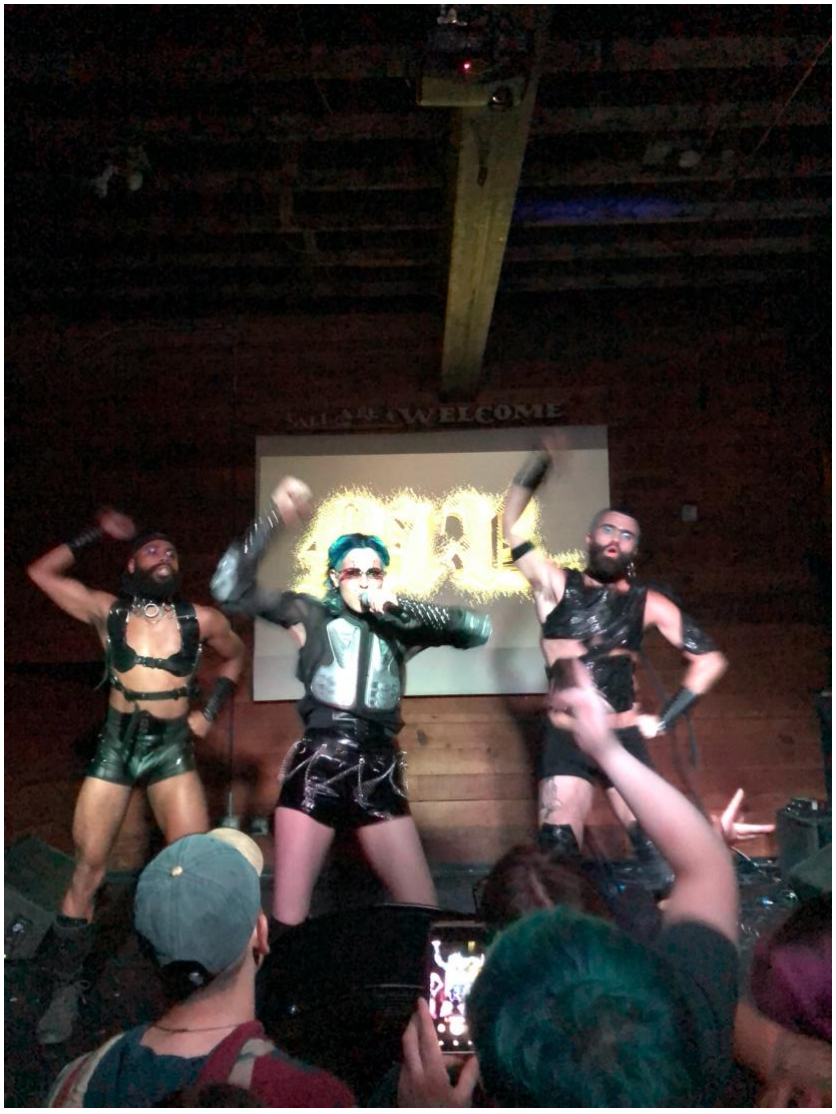

Fig. 1.5. Photo taken by author at Electra's 2019 *The Flamboyant Tour* on September 23, 2019 at Mohawk in Austin, TX.

On their 2019 *The Flamboyant Tour*, Dorian and two queerly masculine presenting dancers adorned in harnesses, chains, and leather simulate sex acts within their hyper-choregraphed dances (Figure 1.5).[133] These two dancers go by the stage names of CHAV and BabyAngel69 and are regularly featured as individual performers during the after

[133] *The Flamboyant Tour*, live performance by Dorian Electra, Mohawk, Austin, September 23, 2019.

shows for Dorian's headlining tour.[134] CHAV is a co-founder of independent record label Flat Pop, "a queer progressive pop label…Flat Pop is pro-trans, pro-POC, pro-woman, pro-gay pop label."[135] In an interview with *PAPER* Magazine, CHAV said their music is about "embodying that Y2K sugary pop queen fantasy, which is a place that as a queer black child I could only appreciate and never take part in."[136] CHAV's Instagram bio also describes their work as a "popstar from another timeline."[137] This clever play on words indicates the similar early-aughts inspiration of CHAV's electronic music work, as member of this Post-Teeny scene themself, that is both referential and contemptuously digital, i.e. time/line. Similarly, BabyAngel69's website describes them as "a theatre baby from Seattle, WA who grew up entranced by the Y2K pop explosion" and lists Spice Girls, Britney Spears, and *NSYNC as primary inspirations.[138] This context then serves to shift the choregraphed performances of Dorian, CHAV, and BabyAngel69 into this newly constituted "boy"band of erotic queer potential. The collective force of Dorian and their non-binary bandmates playfully alternating sexual positions while singing songs with titles such as "Daddy Like" or "Man to Man" plays off of the hyper-choregraphed "girlish masculinity" of boyband's implicit homoeroticism and fully cranks it up into the mode of the absurd. In Figure 1.5, the aestheticism of hyper-stylized BDSM leather harnesses and

134 dorianelectra, Instagram Post, February 12th, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B8fFg4fneIf/.
135 Flatpoprecords, Instagram Account, April 25, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/flatpoprecords/.
136Michael Love Michael, "Queer Label Flat Pop Records: Transforming the Music Biz" *PAPER*, September 11, 2019, https://www.papermag.com/flat-pop-records-launch-2638946234.html?rebelltitem=12#rebelltitem12.
137 Chav.pop, Instagram Account, April 25, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/chav.pop/.
138"About Baby," BABYANGEL69, n.d., https://www.babyangel69.com/#about-section.

chokers create a strategic irony within cultural assumptions of the typical boyband model or articulations of desire. Here, the theatricality of Dorian's vocality, exaggerated choreography, and bombastic lyrics performs a humor predicated on multiple layers of camp strategies of cheeky irony and erotic subversion. Further, as these backup dancers are members and individual performers of this Post-Teeny scene themselves, Dorian's more visible position in the music industry serves to amplify their voices as a well as allows them the space to perform around the country at their after shows. This non-binary "boy"band, therefore, is not only "queer" because of their overt disruptive sexuality and queered gender presentation within and through past frameworks of teenybopper heteronormative desire, but also through their networked support from fellow members of their performance community.

In an effort to expand upon his theories of queer time and the alternate temporalities of subcultures, Jack Halberstam also discusses the boyband framework through New York's Backdoor Boys in the final chapter of *In a Queer Time and Place*. Halberstam cites Wald's piece and specifically applies these larger questions of youth cultures and femininity to the performance of this drag king boy band. In situating this performance of desire, a direct reference to Backstreet Boys, the past is evoked in its most literal way through this subversive recreation. Halberstam describes the energy in the queer bar as palpable, as the screams of girls, boys, and queers alike bring the "fragile edifice of heterosexuality" tumbling down as the "homosocial structures of desire are made

explicit."[139] This impersonation, therefore, recognizes the act as not a performance of male heterosexuality or even gay masculinity, but "rather an intricate performance of butch masculinity, queer masculinity, that presents itself to screaming girls as a safe alternative to hetero-masculinities."[140] Dorian, CHAV, and BabyAngel69's choreography throughout Dorian's set similarly creates a performance of queer masculinity that provides the audience with a (re)signification of teenybopper's heteronormative past, an eroticism that exaggerates idealized tropes of normative desire to satirize binary distinctions of male artists and female consumer, heterosexual agency and homosexual restraint, and masculine performances of feminine pop music.

However, Dorian's band of non-binary performers goes one step past this imitation that is not just a mere reversal through subversion of these boyband tropes but creates this new performative third space that doesn't rely on the past to constitute its existence. Instead, Dorian's "boy"band uses their exclusions from the memory of this genre's past to contextualize a contemporary positionality. This reparative (re)memory of queer exclusions and exploitations reimagines a past where boybands were queer, a reflexivity that both brings to the surface the marginalized queerness of the past as well as creates a distinct lineage between pre-Gay Lib strategies of camp resistance within contemporary modes of performative reclamations. Camp as Dorian's mode of performance creates a separate space from the simple reversal of binary logics that drag kings often embody, while also using mainstream popular culture as a source of inspiration not a necessitation

[139] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 178.
[140] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 179.

of opposition as with subcultures like punk or riot grrrl. As Taylor argues through her queer conceptions of camp, Dorian "transforms binary signifying structures through oblique (and often dramatized or aesthetic) operations."[141] Similarly, in the way that music scene theory does not argue for a purely oppositional relationship to the dominant mainstream culture, camp as a mode of gender exaggeration and performance does not simply reverse or oppose binary logics or value systems. It is within these dynamic interstices, as seen also in Sawayama's hybrid perspective, that camp as a mode of performance lends itself to an articulation of queerness within the convergence of underground and mainstream spaces. Here, my understandings of camp within Dorian Electra's live performance practice outlines the specific (re)signification of boyband homoerotic desire, whereas camp's inherent displacement of binaries further complicates and supports the imaginative spatial dynamics of Dorian's queer world-building through their music video work that also articulates this music scene's position within popular music culture writ large.

[141] Taylor, *Playing It Queer*, 74.

Fig. 1.6. Early aughts fashion example from "VIP" (0:10)

Dorian Electra's music video for the song "VIP" presents a very different aspect of Y2K pop music culture; nightlife. Similar to Sawayama's video for "Ordinary Superstar" the nightclub operates as a quintessential space for queer reimaginations of the past. The first shots of "VIP" pan over the long line waiting to get into the busy club. Holographic bodysuits, glitter, oversized jeans, and chunky platform sneakers adorn the crowd of butches, femmes, and every gender presentation embodiment in-between.[142] As the lyrics to the song begins to parody the false exclusivities of VIP spaces in clubs, the camera pans to Dorian sitting at a club table surrounded by velvet ropes with an array of masculine presenting characters- each more ridiculous than the next. Velour tracksuits, yellow-tinted sunglasses, spiked gel hair, silk button downs fully open to the last button, and leather pants

[142] "VIP (Official Video)," YouTube Video, Posted by "DORIAN ELECTRA," July 27, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8C-jx6NAFY.

(Figure 1.6) both establishes the sartorial reference within this early-aughts moment and sets the stage for the camp theatricality Dorian is famous for.

This moment also establishes clear gender lines between the masculine-presenting onlookers and the femme-presenting dancers on the club floor. As the chorus goes "'Cause I'm a VIP. Everyone wants to be like me. Feelin' like a celebrity. But I'm just a VIP," shots of Warhol and Cher from Studio 54 come on the screen. This interesting historization of queer culture works to both satirize the concept of club celebrity or cultural tastemakers, while also drawing a trajectory of queer avant-garde of then and now. Putting themselves in conversation with one of the most influential visual artists of all time, Dorian uses this hyperbole to argue that the music scene and culture they contribute to within these queer nightclub spaces have always and will continue to be on the frontlines of pushing cultural norms and imaginations of bolder futures.

The song and video feature another member of this music scene, K. Rizz. Self-proclaimed "Filipina princessa pop star," K. Rizz cites late 90s-early 2000s R&B production partnerships between Aliyah and Timberland as key inspirations.[143] As illustrated by the range of LA-based drag kings, queens, and non-binary performance artists featured as the club attendees and background dancers throughout this entire video, Dorian's "VIP" is co-produced by their network of fellow queer artists. As with CHAV and BabyAngel69 during their headlining tour, and as with a K. Rizz's central feature in

[143] Sandra Song, "Meet K Rizz, the Filipina Pop Star with Magical Assless Chaps," *Vice*, January 15, 2015, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/aeqp75/meet-k-rizz-the-filipina-pop-star-with-magical-assless-chaps.

this video, Dorian's queer world-building is both figurative and literal through their partnerships with this larger music scene. The video for the song "VIP," therefore, recreates a prevalent space of queer performance and community-building, the nightclub, through a specific reimagination of Y2K aesthetics and music video tropes to both signal an appreciation for their community of nightlife performers while also asserting the imaginative potential of these spaces to queer time, space, and place. Dorian argues just as the queer creatives of Studio 54 pushed the boundaries of queer art through mainstream parodies of fame, celebrity, and the beginnings of postmodernism, this music scene similarly constructs and circulates a queer subjectivity within and through dominant popular culture memories of the past, experiences in the present, and imaginations of the future.

Fig. 1.7. K. Rizz and fellow femmes take the dancefloor (1:31)

The video beings with Dorian as the center of this club's attention and notoriety, as their VIP section is filled to capacity. Soon, K. Rizz steps on the scene and performs her

verse where she starts to attract Dorian's posse to her side of the club. Soon, this group of masculine-presenting onlookers (Figure 1.6) become entranced by the group of femme-presenting dancers (Figure 1.7).[144] Placed within the sartorial and aesthetic recreations of early-aughts clubs, this gendered separation is a purposeful distinction that simultaneously satirizes the unequal power dynamic of male and female within heterosexual club cultures while also blurring these binaries through a broad range of femme and masc presentations within these constructed divisions of club space. As K. Rizz's section of femmes grows (Figure 1.7), people start leaving Dorian's side until they get so angry over the shifting tides of club capital and the fickle nature of celebrity that they get wasted, break some bottles, and get kicked out of the club. This moment of hyper-masculine aggression serves as the climax of the video, where Dorian's camp theatricality and overblown performance critiques these aggressions through irony. Wallowing in the alleyway and scorning the lost power of their crinkled paper VIP wristband, the bridge of the song breaks from the repetitive chorus to state "I'm just a VIP. You don't even know me. Step behind the velvet rope to find out." This shift from the braggadocios beginning to this metaphor of getting to know someone by breaking down the facade (or velvet ropes) of their insecurities bring this silly song and performance into a clever realm of affective intimacy.

The video continues with Dorian crawling out of the alleyway and back to the entrance as they beg the bouncer for re-entry. It is at this point that K. Rizz steps in and hands Dorian a VIP bracelet made of all gold as the lyrics to the chorus say, "VIP. I see the

[144] "VIP (Official Video)," YouTube Video, Posted by "DORIAN ELECTRA," July 27, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8C-jx6NAFY.

way you look at me. Just like a celebrity. I wanna be your VIP." Whereas the lyrics, housed in an upbeat pop song, could implicate some kind of romantic attraction, the video frames this moment of intimacy as mutual support from fellow members in the music community. Yet again, the pop music video narrative within the queer framing of heterosexual club cultures serves to subvert audience expectations of their gendered dynamics. The femme comes to the rescue of Dorian's bruised hyper-masculinity and instead of reciprocating this help with the implication of a sexual encounter or romantic attraction, the video uses this moment of intimacy to communicate the support of a queer community. Now, Dorian and K. Rizz join forces to dance with the fellow club members as everyone takes shots and celebrates the ecstasy of being in a queer, safe space of expression and community support.

This sentiment of community through queer creations of space is also echoed by the sheer range of identities and gender presentations showcased throughout the video. Drag kings and queers, femmes and butches alike join to recreate this club culture, inspired by the aesthetics of Y2K fashions, to assert the sustained existence of these queer avant-gardes from Studio 54 onward. Similarly toying with concepts of celebrity and cultural reproduction, as indicated by the camp theatrically and irony of the hyperbolic Y2K aestheticism, Dorian cleverly draws a distinct historical lineage to Studio 54 and other club cultures of queers' past. This video signals a queer world-building from camp theatricality that both critiques non-inclusive spaces of club culture exclusivity, but also asserts the imaginative, community-based potentialities of this music scene in pushing future representations of queer nightlife and popular culture writ large.

This queering on multiple temporal levels evokes the past as a critical site of contemporary critique as well as asserts the collective co-production of queer culture that this interconnected, networked Post-Teeny scene specifically represents. Whereas Rina Sawayama's specific use of queer temporality and representations of club space serves to articulate her specifically hybrid positionality as a queer women of Japanese heritage within Western cultural industries, Dorian's recreation of a nightclub space serves to (re)signify the implicit heteronormative organization of club cultures while also paying homage the legacies of queer nightlife creatives that came before. This video not only illustrates the way Dorian queers legacies of camp through parodies of early-aughts heteronormativity within frameworks of pop music desire, but also speaks to the trans-locality of Dorian's involvement and support of this larger network of fellow queer nightlife and music performers. Through the video for "VIP", Dorian illustrates the imaginative world-building possibilities of their music, video, and performance art, but also asserts the historical trajectory and contemporary implications of this music scene's collective (re)memory through a meta-recreation of queer nightlife's postmodern potentialities. Dorian argues, through their work and this video, that this Post-Teeny scene's disruption of mainstream and subcultural, man and woman, pop and punk open up the possibilities of a queer future that continues to be actively forged by this group of independent pop artists.

## A POST-TEENY PAST IS A FUTURE STATE

Once again returning to the endlessly generative work of Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, this chapter takes seriously his assertion that "the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by the presentation of past and future affective worlds."[145] Therefore, the performance of (re)memory cites, creates, and necessitates the cultural and intellectual material for philosopher-performers Rina Sawayama and Dorian Electra's intersecting recreations of physical and virtual queer spatial dynamics through the interwoven temporalities of pop music's restorative heteronormative pasts and imaginative queer futures. Further, in outlining their various (re)imaginations of spaces within Sawayama's global negotiations of hybridity as well as Dorian's co-productions of queer nightlife's translocal network, this chapter illustrates the variety of ways that this collective (re)memory of early-aughts teenybopper pop music operates as connective tissue for this spatially diverse Post-Teeny scene.

This world-building through (re)memoires of queer time and space serves to not only disrupt the regulation and systematic erasure of queer audiences and performers of pop music's pasts, but also restates the value of understanding popular music and cultural memory through the poststructuralist lens of queer theory and postmodernist performance practice. Music scene theory within the specific queer context of this larger music scene, therefore, complicates subcultural theories of music community-formation through its specific disruption of exclusionary cisheteropatriarchal constructs of musical authenticity, cultural taste value, and linear historicity. These ideological tensions of the study of popular

[145] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27.

music communities carry through my academic interventions in chapter two and three to illustrate the ways hyper-feminine, hyper-commercial pop music can also be a space of radical potential through its delineation of cultural hierarchies and its subversive potential to work through and within mainstream forms.

This utopic optimism as critical methodology, as inspired by Muñoz, however, must also problematize the subsequent challenges and mainstream resistances to these disruptive performance practices. Through an analysis of Sawayama's hybrid construction within popular press profiles of the artists, chapter two complicates the textual reading of this chapter to question the potential constraints of temporality when interpreted through identity-based verticals of online popular culture publications. Further, chapter three examines the specific trans*locality of Austin-based performance artist p1nkstar's work to examine the ways their performative disruptions create and operate within a variety of digital spaces through trans*media strategies of virtual co-production. Ultimately, (re)memory through disidentificatory strategies of resistance and revision further support music scene theory's disruption of modernist binaries of mainstream and subcultural to illustrate the dynamic, interwoven temporalities and spatial contexts of these Post-Teeny artists' specific assertion of queerness's endless future potentialities. As Muñoz's argues, queerness is a future state of imaginative potential. It is through recording the work of this music scene that this thesis shares the collective assertion that pop is queer, and it is because of this queerness that we as a community can create a world where pop is the future.

## Chapter Two: Contemporary Constraints of (Re)Memory: Rina Sawayama's Popular Press Constructions and Disidentificatory Negotiations within Mainstream Systems of Promotion

In an August 2018 interview on Charli XCX's Beats1 radio show *The Candy Shop*, Charli and Rina Sawayama discussed the positive and negative implications of Sawayama being an independent artist in the current popular music landscape. Artistic liberty and independence from coordinated release schedules is a crucial positive aspect to the production of Sawayama's music, whereas the lack of funding for videos and tours is the precarious downside of this creative freedom.[146] To mitigate these costs, Sawayama uses her experience and connections as a model to get brand endorsements to pay for her music videos, funnels the revenue from freelance modeling jobs to fund certain legs of her tour, and leverages her visibility within fashion and various popular culture press outlets to further emphasize her marketability in record label and brand endorsement meetings.[147] In this way, Sawayama represents the Post-Teeny class of contemporary independent artists that understand the power of industry branding practices deployed by mainstream media industries as crucial tools of promotion and circulation of their work on their own terms.

Taking into account the disidentificatory practices of her performances and the textual content of her lyrics discussed in the first chapter, Sawayama most acutely represents the tensions and negotiations of racialized queerness for an independent musician within mainstream systems of promotion. Chapter one presents this project's dominant view of a politics of hope as articulated within performative imaginations of the

[146] The Candy Shop with Charli XCX, *The Candy Shop with Charli XCX* (Beats 1 Radio, August 8, 2019).
[147] The Candy Shop with Charli XCX, *The Candy Shop with Charli XCX* (Beats 1 Radio, August 8, 2019).

queer future, but it is crucial to also complicate these utopian perspectives within an entertainment industry that is predicated on capital and power. Integration with mainstream systems of promotion and circulation present productive possibilities for the visibility and industry recognition of queer performance and music artists, but there exists a negotiation of value and meaning as these inherently disruptive articulations of desire, resistance, and temporality get funneled through various levels of publishing and editing. Here, branding and personal narratives become critical tools to speak back against the atemporal constraints of identity politics and reductive popular press coverage. This chapter thus illustrates how Rina, as an independent artist that created her own brand through music and style, preserves a distinct hybrid identity and racialized queerness within systems of promotion that, by nature, seek to simplify and interpolate. Accordingly, hybridity of time and performance act as central frameworks to conceptualize and critique Rina Sawayama's strategic negotiations of brand and identity within her interviews with popular culture and fashion publications.

First, I illustrate the hybrid work and identity of Rina Sawayama through her relationship with queer temporality to establish her connection to Simone Drichel's use of "disjunctive temporality"[148] Through a discourse analysis of over twenty-three different interviews with Sawayama ranging from April 2017 to March 2019, this chapter examines how her multiple axes of difference are constructed in relation to this disruptive, queer temporality. I identify three main narratives within her coverage. Firstly, in line with the

[148] Simone Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34, no. 6 (2008), doi:10.1177/0191453708090330.

main thematic framework of her first EP *RINA* (2017), the tensions between positive and negative affect of digital identity exploration is key in establishing the innovation of her work. Secondly, her experiences of a Japanese upbringing within systems of white heteronormative British patriarchy come to be defined as key both to her emotional authenticity and also her artistic impetus to incorporate hybrid references of Western Y2K pop with late 80s, 90s J-Pop. Lastly, her constantly evolving relationship with sexual identity becomes central to her coverage after her public coming out as pansexual in August 2018. I examine how popular press reveals these complicated dynamics of hybrid temporalities from these three themes in her music in conjunction with her strategic personal narrative.

To establish both the inherent hybrid identity and subjective queerness of Sawayama's work, I apply Drichel's oppositional theories of ontological hybridity and performative hybridity. Sawayama's moments of performative articulations recount various experiences of her childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood that creates a consistent narrativization of her hybrid cultural identity across a variety of popular press profiles. Signaling a unique disruption of linear temporarily through her contemporary appropriations of pop music's past, the reflexivity of her work and the subsequent inspirations of her lyrical and thematic content, allows Sawayama's personal experiences with racism, patriarchy, and colonialism to be central to her coverage. This artistic device of past musical appropriations, therefore, strategically reveals present discriminatory stereotypes of her lived hybridity within the Western industry to forge innovative, inclusive futures for other marginalized pop artists. However, this performativity is sometimes

challenged through the framing of a fixed, ontological identity politics implicit within some of Sawayama's later popular press coverage.

This chapter methodologically centers around two distinct moments in Sawayama's popular press coverage. In one of her earliest profile-length pieces in December 2017, *Interview* magazine's Thomas Clark called Sawayama "the future of pop."[149] This moniker defined much of her early coverage, which expanded upon her innovation of early-aughts sonic stylings and aesthetics while also writing about pertinent contemporary issues of digital anxieties and social isolation. This futuristic framing of her work then shifts with her public coming-out as pansexual in August 2018. This latter part of this chapter, therefore, examines the shift from this general classification of futuristic style and genre-based innovation to her March 2019 classification as "the future of queer pop" by *Gay Times*'s Daniel Megarry.[150] This transition in framing is clearly facilitated by an evolution in press attention, from early coverage in music, fashion, and popular culture press outlets such as *The FADER*, *PAPER*, *Interview* and *V Magazine*, to post-coming out coverage in mid-2018 identity-based presses such as *Gay Times*, *Billboard Pride*, *Broadly*, and *INTO*. The shift from the implicit queerness of her art as indicated by the discursivity of her gender performance and lyrical content soon becomes obfuscated by fixed terms of her pansexuality, as identity becomes the dominant rhetoric of her popular press coverage. Here, the implicit queer subjectivity of her temporally discursive work becomes fixed

[149] Thomas Clarke, "Is Rina Sawayama the Future of Pop?," *Interview Magazine*, November 30, 2017, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/rina-sawayama-pop-future.
[150] Daniel Megarry, "Rina Sawayama Is the Future of Queer Pop," *Gay Times*, March 22, 2019, https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/120247/rina-sawayama-is-the-future-of-queer-pop.

within the present, as the futurity of her work is then privileged as the future of queer Asian representation and not as the innovative future of style, genre, and politics within pop music.

The chapter's application of José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications* examines Sawayama's popular press construction as a multivalent, or hybrid, reaction against the regulatory power of interpellation through reductive categories of multiculturalism. I position my analysis of Rina Sawayama's temporal framing through her popular press coverage within a specific moment of online journalism where certain media companies are buying up and forming identity-based verticals as an extension of their digital footprint within increasing audience segmentation.[151] It is through frameworks of temporality that I situate my analysis of the counterpublic use-value, politicized meaning, and imaginative potentials of popular press coverage of Sawayama's work that seeks to regulate a performatively hybrid artist within fixed, ontological identity politics.

With the recent development of identity-based verticals such as Valence Media's *Billboard Pride* and VICE's *Broadly*, issues of reductive framing through the valence of identity politics presents a unique convergence, as an increasing amount of underground queer artists break into these systems of mainstream promotion, such as Dorian Electra and Rina Sawayama. Whereas chapter one presents an overwhelming hopeful outcome of the increasing community-building potentials of these mainstream circulations, this chapter poses a cautionary note against the liberal progress narrative implied within this increasing

[151] Examples such as Vice Media's *Broadly* in 2015, Conde Nast's *them.* in 2017, and Valence Media's *Billboard Pride* in 2018.

quantity to examine the role of queerness and temporality within these logics of promotion. Sawayama, as a case study for this chapter's discourse analysis, therefore, also represents a particular moment in which to better understand and critique the operationalization of identity politics within mainstream popular press constructions of an inherently discursive and hybrid pop music artist.

## SIMONE DRICHEL'S PERFORMATIVE HYBRIDITY OF STEREOTYPES

In order to unpack the role of temporality within Sawayama's work and her subsequent construction of hybrid identity in popular press, I first engage with Simone Drichel's "The Time of Hybridity." In an effort to clarify what she believes to be a widely misunderstood theory of hybridity, Drichel revisits Homi Bhabha's third space of hybridity to reiterate the importance of temporality in maintaining the performative, disruptive aspects of this theory: as a caution against a simplified, fixed ontological definition of hybridity and hybrid identity.[152] Drichel begins by reasserting the atemporality of hybridity's antithesis, stereotypes.[153] This atemporality however, is only established through the partial recognition of the stereotype's existence. Bhabha's "third space" of hybridity resists the linear temporal logic of binarized versions of biculturalism and is therefore able to recognize the impact of stereotypes of one cultural space on "the other" without perpetuating and creating its own stereotypes within this temporally disjunctive third space.[154] Drichel argues that through the recognition of the fixity of stereotypes and the

[152] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," 587.
[153] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," 589.
[154] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity,", 588.

resultant obfuscation of this atemporality, hybridity is distinguished from other forms of cultural syncretism.[155] It is due to the complex relationship with temporality that Bhabha's hybridity avoids the fixed stereotype of "the other."

Judith Butler argues that the moment of otherness, as constituted by colonial discourse, is reclaimed through the process of recitation. Butler and Bhabha similarly understand agency of the hybrid other in this performance or reiteration of these essentialized stereotypes. In an interview, Butler explains:

> [the] real task is to figure out how a subject who is constituted in and by discourse then recites that very same discourse but perhaps to another purpose. For me that's always been the question of how to find agency, the moment of that recitation or that replay of discourse that is the condition of one's own emergence.[156]

Butler goes on to also categorize the moment of this interpellation as inherently temporal, as "being called a name…gives a certain possibility for social existence" that then introduces this form of being into the "temporal life of language."[157] Drichel argues that through this process of interpellation first established the ontological definition of the other, a definition that is transformed into the reclaimed agency of the individual through a performance of this language and moment in time.[158] For Sawayama, her conceptualization of her work and identity is not fixed in the present, as her sonic and aesthetic characteristics of her music and visual work disrupt linear notions of time to critically evaluate her contemporary positionality and her work's subsequent futurity. In this way, the disjunctive

[155] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," 589.
[156] Vikki Bell, "On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Performativity and Belonging* 16, no. 2 (1999), doi:10.4135/9781446219607.n9, 165.
[157] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
[158] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," 598.

temporality of Sawayama's work carries an additional cultural context other than simply disputing the fixed stereotype of ontological otherness. Sawayama's otherness is also dependent on these temporal forces and contexts of past, present, and future that allows her performative otherness to carry political significance in the disruption of white hegemonic industries.

## MULTIRACIAL ASIAN PERSPECTIVES AND MEDIA ACTIVISM

In relation to the hybrid pop music project of Sawayama, temporality plays a crucial role in the iteration, performance, and disruption of cultural stereotypes of a Japanese female body in a male-dominated Western industry. In the introduction of her book, *Undercover Asians: Multiracial Asians in American Visual Culture*, LeiLani Nishime explains how over-sexualization of Asian American female representations are deeply embedded within ideologies of "Cold War liberal project of the 1950s-1960s".[159] In an effort to justify the imperialist aspirations of the United States during this time, Nishime argues that Asian women were constructed as "saved" by the white man though marriages of gendered subordination and cultural hierarchies. Depictions of Asian femininity within a Western context, therefore, relied on sexuality as a tactic of exoticized othering and gender-based submission.[160] Christine R. Yano situates these essentialisms within the contemporary through her nuanced discussion of kawaii in "Flipping Kitty: Transnational Transgressions of Japanese Cute". Yano draws a direction connection between hyper-

[159] LeiLani Nishime, *Undercover Asians: Multiracial Asians in American Visual Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 9.
[160] Nishime, *Undercover Asians*, 9.

commodified and hyper-sexualized Western understandings of kawaii through the global popularity of the Hello Kitty franchise. Yano connects Merry White's argument that kawaii as a hyper-cute aesthetic of youth and innocence embeds connotations of weakness and vulnerability that creates "fundamental relationalities of helpless and helper, the dependent and the depended upon, and in some cases the prey and the prey-er."[161] Yano further argues that as these toys become a global phenomenon, they come to represent a broad range of fears related to globalism- a particularly racialized threat that must be contained. Across these various examples of representations of Asian femininity, essentialized depictions of sexualization operate as methods of control and subordination rooted in racist and imperialist ideologies. Yano and Nishime, however, also explore the various appropriations and strategic uses of these tropes that present future possibilities against these stereotypical and racist essentialisms.

Borrowing work from multiracial and interracial studies scholar LeiLani Nishime and Asian American media scholar Lori Kido Lopez, this chapter understands Sawayama's commentary on the visual regimes of whiteness and its subsequent devaluations or essentializations of her body and image as representative of larger discussions of race, gender, and sexuality within the contemporary popular music and fashion industries. Both of these scholars apply critical feminist and queer perspectives to their analysis of various Asian American texts and celebrities to highlight the, "resistive possibilities of the production of multiracial representation through a mobilization of queer and ambiguous

[161] Christine R. Yano, "Flipping Kitty: Transnational Transgressions of Japanese Cute," in *Medi@Sia: Global Media/Tion In and Out of Context*, ed. Todd Joseph Miles Holden and Timothy J. Scarse (Routledge, 2006), pp. 209-223, 211.

sexuality."[162] In a chapter of Nishime's *Undercover Asians*, she examines the queered and racialized camp aesthetic of Kimora Lee Simmons's late 2000s reality show, *Life in the Fab Lane*, as resistances to power hierarchies embedded in class and gender difference that define Kimora's celebrity.[163] Lori Kido Lopez relatedly outlines the discursivity of YouTuber Michelle Phan's social media construction in her book *Asian American media activism: Fighting for cultural citizenship* to illustrate the multiple, and oftentimes mainstream, avenues of media activism.[164] While both of these texts examine hybrid Asian identity within the frameworks of U.S. popular culture and citizenship, Rina Sawayama as a media text circulated mostly within the U.S. and Europe still represents the cultural and racial tensions articulated within Nishime's and Lopez's work.

In situating this chapter in relation to Lopez's extensive study of digital media activism and community formations, I similarly assert the value of Sawayama's queer and feminist politics within mainstream spaces of promotion and circulation. In describing the traumatizing experience of being forced into culturally decontextualized, inauthentic, and stereotypical geisha outfits for a modeling gig and being incorrectly essentialized as apart of Western commodified culture of Kawaii cuteness, Sawayama points to these crucial moments of interpellation of her otherness within the context of Western cultural

[162] Nishime, *Undercover Asians*, 17.
[163] Nishime, *Undercover Asians*.
[164] Lori Kido Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism: Fighting for Cultural Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

industries.[165][166] It is through the retelling of these moments of racist and essentialist interpellation within in interviews, music videos, and songs that reinscribes these moments of regulation on her hybrid identity as moments of agency through articulation of difference. By understanding the possibilities of mainstream resistances to reductionist and hegemonic interpellations through feminist and queer frameworks, these scholars influence my understanding of Sawayama's distinctly multiracial and hybrid life narrative as a series of strategic performances that imagines a more expansive future for similarly raced bodies within mainstream popular music culture.

In a similar way that the alterity of time works to disrupt a stereotypical, fixed, ontological definition of "the other," the heterogenous temporality of Sawayama's work is crucial to the performative iterability of her constantly evolving hybridity. Chapter one discusses these specific moments of interwoven temporalities through the textual analysis of the "Ordinary Superstar" music video and its elements of 80s Tokyo nightlife spatial reconstruction, 90s J-Pop aesthetics, early-aughts U.S. teenybopper sonic characteristics, and contemporary articulations of queerness through performance. Sawayama's music and performance therefore recreates this moment of "disjunctive temporality" that questions the reproduction of stereotypical representations through her direct confrontations with pop music's past and present regulating, or interpolating, systems of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia.[167]

[165] Thomas Clarke, "Is Rina Sawayama the Future of Pop?," *Interview Magazine*, November 30, 2017, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/rina-sawayama-pop-future.
[166] "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.
[167] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," 589.

Sawayama's performance of difference and her agency in otherness, therefore, relies on the repetition, or iterability, of this hybrid identity as separation from the ideality of stereotypes. Drichel argues that without this relationship to temporality, hybridity becomes "part of a new binary couplet that arrests the movement of differences and locks them into an essentializing binary opposition between hybridity and essentialism."[168] For the temporal queering of this pop music project to be successful in separating Sawayama's lived reality from essentialized stereotypes of Japanese bodies in Western industries, she is in a constant state of performance and reperformance of this regulating language. It is only through this iterability that her hybrid identity begins to lose its attachment to the confines of ontological definition of hybridity and open up to possibilities of a performative, queer hybridity. Drichel, Butler, and Bhabha argue this is only possible through a disjunctive temporality, a temporality that I defined as implicitly queer within relation to the past, present, and future commentary of Sawayama's subjectivity in Chapter one. I connect Drichel's conception of binary framings of hybridity and essentialism to theories of performativity's iterability and hybridity's interwoven and dynamic temporality to set the stage for an examination of how contemporary identity politics both creates the connective tissue of community for this Post-Teeny music scene, but also constrains these productive sites of cultural exchange within reductive and essentialist frameworks of popular press coverage.

[168] Drichel, "The Time of Hybridity," 605.

In 1999 José Esteban Muñoz argued, "accounts of mainstream identity are, in most instances, unable to account for the specificity of black and queer lives or any other collision of two or more minority designations."[169] Rina Sawayama presents a crucial case study to reexamine Muñoz's argument two decades later, as well as highlight the continued resonance of his conceptualizations of the political potentials of counterpublics that "are not magically and automatically realized through disidentifications but they are suggested, rehearsed, and articulated."[170] Put in conversation with Nishime and Kido Lopez's work on the mainstream and commercial spaces of various strategies of Asian American media activism, I understand Sawayama's specific narratives about her Japanese heritage, British upbringing, and pansexuality as, "disidentificatory maneuvers that…forge an activist anti-identitarian counterpublicity."[171] Representing larger negotiations between discourses of mainstream promotional logics and strategies of disidentificatory counterpublics, Sawayama's consistent narratives across her popular press coverage as rhetorical resistances to essentializing constraints of identity politics poses critical questions about this moment in popular music culture and queer visibility.[172]

## SAWAYAMA'S DIGITAL ANXIETY AS MILLENNIAL EXPERIENCE

As mentioned in chapter one, many early profiles of Sawayama connects her lyrical and visual work involving contemporary digital disembodied anxiety and online self-presentation through past musical styles to a renewed urgency, or a productive new future,

[169] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 166.
[170] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 179.
[171] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 166.
[172] See: Gamson (1995), Edelman (2004), and Gifford (2000).

in pop music.[173] Sawayama's commentary on digital life and experiences with social media is therefore constructed as a temporal innovation of content; her past style subverts present anxieties to forge a different type of direction for substantive pop music. An April 2018 interview with *PAPER* magazine explains her common moniker by various publications as the "future of pop," as being "likely for her ability to capture the anxieties of the digital age and package them in nostalgic, yet forward-facing pop melodies."[174] The various interwoven temporalities of this description defines the exact type of dynamic coverage that surrounds Sawayama's lyrical commentary on digital anxieties. In an effort to draw tension and interest through opposition, the "nostalgic" sounds of Sawayama's early-aughts teenybopper inspirations serves as a framing device for music that addresses contemporaneous issues and feelings of digital identity-formation.

Sawayama's brand as an independent pop musician "making millennium-era pop feel urgent again" is particularly acute within her early coverage (April 2017-April 2018) by music and fashion outlets, such as *The FADER*, *PAPER*, and Vice's *Noisey*. Within these profiles, Sawayama's (re)memory of previous pop music genres like early-aughts teenybopper and late-90s R&B within contemporaneously pertinent lyrical content positions her futurist value within innovation of form and content of her work.[175] The built-

[173] Owen Myers, "Rina Sawayama Is Making Millennium-era Pop Feel Urgent Again," *The FADER*, November 14, 2017, https://www.thefader.com/2017/11/03/rina-sawayama-rina-mini-album-interview-digital-anxiety.
[174] Justin T. Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6.
[175] Owen Myers, "Rina Sawayama Is Making Millennium-era Pop Feel Urgent Again," *The FADER*, November 14, 2017, https://www.thefader.com/2017/11/03/rina-sawayama-rina-mini-album-interview-digital-anxiety.

in implications of multiple overlapping temporalities of her music's thematic and lyrical content of this first wave of Sawayama's coverage therefore constructs a hybrid pop artist whose relation to time and space is conveyed as an innovation of pop music form and futuristic style.

While stereotypes are most directly addressed in her comments on her Japanese lived identity and music industry constraints, there is a more implicit form of millennial stereotyping as lazy, self-obsessed, and unaware that Sawayama tackles within her exploration of identity formation in the digital age. Often described as an encapsulation of the "experiences as an East Asian millennial," Sawayama's construction within popular press organizes her star text as "infinitely relatable" in her conversations of emancipatory disembodied publics, lived imposter syndrome, and social media inadequacy.[176] In recognizing the everyday digital and mental labor of existing within multiple publics online, Sawayama's early work garnered a lot of attention from online pop culture and fashion publications. The multiple temporal levels of past, present, and future are very much signified within popular press articles by Sawayama's thematic connection to the digital; a lived experience that provides nuances to the often trite, stereotypical characterizations of digital technologies' negative effects on millennials within normative societal conventions of sociability and maturity.

One of the common narratives around Sawayama as a digital artist is her relationship to branding in the digital age, a phenomenon that places value on creative and

[176] Steffanee Wang, "We're Rooting for Rina Sawayama and You Should Be Too," *The FADER*, July 10, 2018, https://www.thefader.com/2018/07/05/rina-sawayama-cyber-stockholm-syndrome-rina-interview.

professional labor in the digital economy. In a video interview with *MTV News* in May 2018, Sawayama recounts the origins of her album from her experiences as a model in the early 2010s: "The modeling agency…they were encouraging us to build our social following and I guess everyone's sort of trying to do that right? And it was making me so anxious. Once I realized what it was that was making me so anxious, all of the lyrics just came afterwards, it was so easy to write."[177] These feelings of branding in the gig economy extends to a variety of creative and digital professionals from artists, journalist, models, to even academics. In connecting these anxieties of social media presentation to ideas of labor and a precarious job market, Sawayama dispels negative stereotypes of self-obsession in these digital outlets and instead, exposes how these publics are levied as cultural, social, and economic capital for much of the millennial population. In response to a question about some of her favorite, most poignant lyrics, she responds, "'Burn bright, don't burn out', is my message to our generation, who I feel- contrary to popular belief- works way too hard."[178] In this relationship with temporality, Sawayama's coverage calls into question millennial stereotypes of laziness and apathy in illustrating that generational separations of ideology are very much dependent on a nuanced understanding of the digital and its effect on lived realities within the labor market.

Her relationship with the digital and creative labor, however, is not always framed as a deviation from stereotypes. A prevailing narrative around her creative self-perception

[177] "Rina Sawayama Defines Her Musical Style on the Internet & Technology," YouTube video, posted by "MTV News," May 10, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcdKbFvW008.
[178] Erica Russell, "Rina Sawayama Is Your Digital Dream Girl," *V Magazine*, April 13, 2017, https://vmagazine.com/article/rina-sawayama-musics-digital-dream-girl/.

details her relationship with the music cloud-sharing app Soundcloud. In this digital public, anyone can create a profile and upload their own music. Largely popular for music industry agents as well as for fans of independent music, this app continues to alter the music industry in significant ways. Sawayama, however, is consistent across her coverage in claiming the downfalls of existing and participating in this sharing app. Integral to the timeliness of the industry, of what is current or striking a nerve with contemporary audiences, Sawayama claims she was, "constantly looking sideways at what people in [her] age bracket are doing, and for somebody like me—who's experienced bullying—that is the worst thing ever. You don't want to be comparing yourself."[179] This anxiety in comparison of other people's contribution the music industry is then constructed as an internal proclamation of deviation from this trendy timeliness of current pop music. No longer looking sideways for inspiration, Sawayama describes a feeling of artistic freedom and liberty that allowed her the space to explore her true influences such as 90s J-Pop and early 2000s Britney-era pop.[180] This interview in *Nosiey*, along with several others, connects her nostalgic style of the past with an impetus for "taking it back to an era where the songwriting had to be sold" separate from the contemporary era where "a lot of [pop music] relies on the production and the millennial whoop."[181] Unlike her comments on the relatability of millennial experience, Sawayama here is seen as an innovative deviation

[179] Chloe Sheppard and Daisy Jones, "The Subversive Pop Power of Rina Sawayama," *Vice*, November 20, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/j5jne3/rina-sawayama-interview-2017.
[180] Chloe Sheppard and Daisy Jones, "The Subversive Pop Power of Rina Sawayama," *Vice*, November 20, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/j5jne3/rina-sawayama-interview-2017.
[181] Owen Myers, "Rina Sawayama Is Making Millennium-era Pop Feel Urgent Again," *The FADER*, November 14, 2017, https://www.thefader.com/2017/11/03/rina-sawayama-rina-mini-album-interview-digital-anxiety.

from stereotypical tropes in millennial-based musical forms. In this way, her comments on the universality of digital worlds and millennial experiences is what constructs her as relatable, but her deviations from electronic beats associated with millennial-made pop is what constructs her brand of art as innovative. This nuanced merger of past style with an urgency of present societal issues comes together to illustrate a futuristic outlook on pop music's potentiality for change.

Sawayama not only relates to millennials through rhetoric of digital labor and branding, but also in her content regarding the interstitial feelings of identity fragmentation within these various digital publics. Through her nuanced perspectives on digital affect in songs like "Where U Are," much of the popular press conversations and interview questions are framed within specific inquires of her experiences which led to these works. In Erica Russel's April 2017 article for *V Magazine*, a fashion publication that focuses on rising music talent, Sawayama is framed as a "cyber-philosopher preoccupied with exploring and challenging the shifting frameworks of self-identity in the era of Web 2.0."[182] This quote, partnered with the article's title, "Rina Sawayama is Your Digital Dream Girl," Sawayama becomes an established authority of her experiences but also more universal experiences of digital identity exploration. Unlike the harsh realities of self-commodification within online social media branding strategies, Sawayama highlights some of the emancipatory potentials of online within the coverage related to these songs. Much of these comments are put in conversation with her song "Cyber Stockholm

[182] Erica Russell, "Rina Sawayama Is Your Digital Dream Girl," *V Magazine*, April 13, 2017, https://vmagazine.com/article/rina-sawayama-musics-digital-dream-girl/.

Syndrome," which tells the story of a girl who is more comfortable with social interactions on her phone than in real life.[183] In what started as a song about her phone being a captor of her personality, Sawayama came to realize the more nuanced, romantic relationship as a "tool of self-discovery."[184] The queer subjectivities of Sawayama's comments on the digital, therefore, are articulated through these conversations of liminality of identity exploration in inherently interstitial spaces of being. In these early profiles of the artists, she was not yet officially out as pansexual, but her language and presentation is coded in specifically queer ways through her disruptive temporalities of online identity exploration. Whether it be an interview location in a "grungy queer bar" or her joyous remarking of her favorite video game character as anti-heteronormative and "a bit queer," Sawayama's strategic blending of masculine and feminine coded language in her self-descriptions as well as the art direction of many of these early profiles indicate a looming queer subjectivity that very much informs her moniker as futuristic.[185][186]

These early profiles in music-specific popular press outlets focus most acutely on her relationship with digital publics of the present and her sonic and stylistic innovations of the past. As her lived identities become more explicitly framed as the focus on these profile-length pieces, Sawayama's commentary on millennial stereotypes become

[183] Rina Sawayama, "Cyber Stockholm Syndrome," recorded 2016, track 8 in *RINA*, Clarence Clarity, 2016, MP3.
[184] "Read an Interview with Digi-Popstar Rina Sawayama," *Beat Magazine*, September 20, 2017, http://www.thebeatjuice.com/2017/08/30/read-interview-digi-popstar-rina-sawayama/.
[185] Chloe Sheppard and Daisy Jones, "The Subversive Pop Power of Rina Sawayama," *Vice*, November 20, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/j5jne3/rina-sawayama-interview-2017.
[186] Owen Myers, "Rina Sawayama Is Making Millennium-era Pop Feel Urgent Again," *The FADER*, November 14, 2017, https://www.thefader.com/2017/11/03/rina-sawayama-rina-mini-album-interview-digital-anxiety.

increasingly framed as politically-charged music of "girl power," Asian female empowerment, and "the future of queer pop."[187][188] This early coverage from music-specific popular press outlets is significant in its classification of her type of innovation in content, as Sawayama's commentary on issues of digital labor dispels stereotypes through a nuanced approach to pop music. While the formal qualities of Y2K Britney Spears and Max Martin pop is celebrated as dynamic and legitimate within these popular music-specific press outlets, Sawayama's futurity in innovation as determined by fashion and identity-based popular press outlets soon becomes more dependent on her articulations of difference and lived reality than her implicated identity hybridity and queer sensibilities in her early art. While this new framing does not necessarily obscure the content of these digital anxieties, it places these feelings within a politicized recognition of her difference-an identity politics in action through her construction as an Asian artist and as a queer artist.

## SAWAYAMA'S EAST ASIAN HERITAGE IN WESTERN MUSIC INDUSTRY

The temporality of Sawayama's art is constructed in several different, sometimes conflicting ways in her popular press coverage. In terms of her life narrative, every profile-length article discusses Sawayama's time at Cambridge in London as representative of the oppressive experience of living as a queer Japanese woman in an environment that privileges white heteronormative patriarchy. Not only does this validate the political content of her work by establishing authority through her degree in Politics, Psychology,

[187] Justin T. Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6.
[188] Daniel Megarry, "Rina Sawayama Is the Future of Queer Pop," *Gay Times*, March 22, 2019, https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/120247/rina-sawayama-is-the-future-of-queer-pop/.

and Sociology, but this framing also temporally structures Sawayama's difference into neat time frames of Japanese childhood, repressed British adolescence, and fully hybrid present. Sawayama articulates these musical influences as they relate to the temporality of her hybrid identity in Russell's previously mentioned April 2017 article for *V Magazine*; "I went to Japanese school in London until I was about ten, where I only listened to J-Pop, so the first Western music I heard was that of early 2000s era: Britney, Justin, Beyoncé, Avril Lavigne, Aliyah."[189] The music and fashion popular press pieces of Sawayama's pre-coming out coverage, therefore, frames her work within this hybridization of geographical East and West, but also genres in pop music styles that transcend cultural and physical boundaries. In this life narrative, temporality is used to rationalize her multitude of influences into categories of difference, but also to blur the boundaries of her present work that destabilizes both the immigrant childhood experience of alienation and the adolescent to early adulthood experience of anxiety in assimilation. This story constructs a relatable artist for many other children of immigrants, but also gives her work a distinct political purpose to challenge the oppressive categorizations of difference inflicted by both society and Western music industries.

Sawayama's East Asian heritage plays a crucial role in the popular press coverage of her work, mainly in relation to her own personal life narrative of growing up in Japan and moving to the UK at a young age. The description for the video "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama" reads:

[189] Erica Russell, "Rina Sawayama Is Your Digital Dream Girl," *V Magazine*, April 13, 2017, https://vmagazine.com/article/rina-sawayama-musics-digital-dream-girl/.

> Through Rina Sawayama's alternative take on East Asian beauty standards and philosophical, "glittery cute" R&B sound, the Niigata-born, London-bred musician and model has carved a path of her own with few precedents to look up to. Celebrating her unique take on Eastern-meets-Western culture, in this latest instalment of i-D Meets we put Rina's childhood gaming skills to the test through a round of Final Fantasy and Dance Dance Revolution – and talk about her experiences as an East Asian woman in the entertainment industry and her admirable ambitions for the future.[190]

Not mentioned anywhere by Sawayama in this video interview, nor in any of the accompanying profiles on the artists, the description of her "glittery cute" sound places Sawayama's music dangerously close to the stereotypical, commodified depictions of kawaii femininity that she deliberately speaks against. Even within a video that explicitly discusses these essentialist categories of Western cultural industries, Sawayama's work is made legible through allusions to these categorizations. As mentioned in chapter one, *i-D* is a publication self-described as "a consistent source of inspiration for fashion culture" that has its origins "as a fanzine dedicated to the street style of punk-era London in 1980" that now "has developed into a glossy magazine that documents fashion and contemporary culture."[191] Also a Vice Media property, this video interview and subsequent description serve as an interesting comparison for the type of language used to describe Sawayama in Daisy Jones's November 2017 article for *Noisey*, Vice's music-specific online vertical. The byline for Jones's article, "The Subversive Pop Power of Rina Sawayama," describes Rina's music as "a masterclass in pop music history reworked for a generation brought up

190 "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.
191 "About Us," i-D (*Vice*, August 7, 2017), https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/page/i-d-about-us-en-uk.

on the Instagram timeline."[192] Whereas time plays a critical role in both Jones's article and the description for the *i-D* video interview, the object of these interwoven and overlapping temporalities is much different.

For example, Jones's article describes Sawayama's life narrative as: "Rina found herself coming of age in the UK at the turn of the millennium, raised on the effervescent, candy-coated sounds of J-Pop on one side, and the meticulously crafted Max Martin golden era of Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Backstreet Boys on the other."[193] This article for *Noisey* obviously centers her playful (re)memory of pop music's past as a disruption of linearity of time and place as past and present intersect with a dynamic cultural negotiation of East and West through various music inspirations and references. Even within the innovation of pop music as the future-leaning object of these interwoven temporalities, however, the accompanying adjectives of these genres imbue a racialized hierarchy. Similar to the use of "glittery cute" by *i-D*, the description of J-pop as "candy coated" implies a context of commodified cuteness whereas the Western cultural object of this comparison is constructed as formally legitimate, or "meticulously crafted". As mentioned previously, these descriptions of pop music's pasts from interwoven points of geographic origin describe Sawayama's uniqueness and innovation within genre-based musical terms that are further constructed as futuristic through her contemplative lyrics regarding contemporary digital culture. This example illustrates how these constructions can

[192] Chloe Sheppard and Daisy Jones, "The Subversive Pop Power of Rina Sawayama," *Vice*, November 20, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/j5jne3/rina-sawayama-interview-2017.
[193] Chloe Sheppard and Daisy Jones, "The Subversive Pop Power of Rina Sawayama," *Vice*, November 20, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/j5jne3/rina-sawayama-interview-2017.

simultaneously illustrate and support Sawayama's hybrid work, yet also rely on stereotypical descriptors that are accessible to these publications' broad audience.

As indicated by the above description for Vice Media's fashion publication *i-D*, these cultural negotiations take on a much more personal life narrative when framed in visual mediums that depict Sawayama's "alternative take on East Asian beauty standards."[194] The video profile begins with Sawayama describing meetings with record executives, "They'll be like X is the new Adele, this person is the new Janet Jackson, when they see me, they're like you want to be the next…" Ending this sentence with a long pause and confused look on her face, Sawayama's "Alterlife" plays as a montage of Sawayama playing Dance Dance Revolution in an empty neon-saturated arcade introduces one of the primary interiors of this interview. The video profile continues to describe Sawayama's shame in being a child of an immigrant in mostly white school and cultural environments, a racist modeling job where she was asked to dress up in a "fake geisha outfit" and serve tea to a room of mostly white executives, as well as the entertainment industry's inability to place her within typical pop music persona typologies due to her cultural identity and gender presentation.[195] Speaking about various non-profits she works with such as Angry Asian Girls, Sawayama recounts reading about and discovering online "discussions of like racism against East Asian women in particular" and how she hopes her work can provide a community of activism for fans through digital spaces that they might not have access to

[194] "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.
[195] "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.

IRL. Sawayama's "admirable ambitions for the future," as positioned through *i-D*'s video interview's description, are understood as progressing the visibility of a hybrid pop star like herself to challenge the outdated and inherently white cultural scripts the music industry maps onto mainstream female pop music performers. Further, her commentary on digital anxieties and virtual self-construction now take a racialized context through this alignment with identity-based activism and media representations. This video positions Sawayama's work and creativity as a reaction against and (re)memory of these distinct moments of discrimination and systematic racism where the future potentials of this work exists through her ability to create representational and digital spaces of community and activism.

Future-forms of Sawayama's work, and the temporalities of her past and present, take slightly different forms when she has complete control over her portrayal and construction. As discussed in a video interview for frequent-collaborator Nicola Formichetti's personal YouTube page, Rina explains, "It was hard in the beginning, when I first started making music. It was hard for me to find my little niche, but I kind of looked inward and found out what I was inspired by and it was all Japanese culture. And that's when I became good and happy with my cultural background."[196] Nicola further connects these feelings to growing up in an immigrant household describing how he rebelled against his heritage as a teenager, only then to reclaim it through creative expression as an adult

[196] "RINA SAWAYAMA: FASHION TRANSFORMATION," YouTube video, posted by "NICOLA FORMICHETTI," May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7833tiILKas.

that transformed both this angst and cultural background into purposeful work. To which Sawayama replies,

> I one hundred percent agree. I think I was trying to grow up and trying to be white and when I finally became okay with how the world saw me, is when I became okay with myself and I have just continued to explore and push the boundary of Asian culture, of Japanese culture, of what it means to be Asian in the West and trying to redefine that. There's been stereotypes coming and going and there is still existent stereotypes, but its important push and break those…to give other people the opportunity to speak and be themselves and tell the truth.[197]

This statement prompts a conversation of "the type of futurism that Japanese people are so good at," as Nicola's brand NICOPANDA similarly plays with queer influences from the Western club culture and Japanese Harajuku street fashion.[198] Rooting her own conception of hybrid cultural identity within linear frameworks of her life narrative, her past experiences with internalized shame of her Japanese heritage within mostly white social environments of her youth very much inform her politicized pop music and persona construction that seeks to push past barriers of industry stereotypes and essentialisms of Asian femininity. Instead, this conversation between two Japanese creatives working in Western music and fashion industries creates a counterdiscourse against stereotypes surrounding their hybrid identities to illustrate the distinct ways their collaborations, discussed at length in chapter one, create new possibilities of queer futures through mainstream pop music videos, ad campaigns, and social media engagement.

[197] "RINA SAWAYAMA: FASHION TRANSFORMATION," YouTube video, posted by "NICOLA FORMICHETTI," May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7833tiILKas.
[198] "RINA SAWAYAMA: FASHION TRANSFORMATION," YouTube video, posted by "NICOLA FORMICHETTI," May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7833tiILKas.

This conversation is important for several reasons. First, it establishes a common narrative of Sawayama's hybrid identity that was suppressed for much of her adolescence and early adulthood, only to be recently reclaimed through her dynamic temporal interplay of 90s J-Pop and Y2K Western Pop. Secondly, this video highlights her conscious deviation from industry stereotypes, to many of which her Eastern Asian body and queer subjectivity do not conform. Finally, this conversation illustrates the shared cultural experience of these two queer Japanese creatives in Western industries of fashion and music and how their hybrid identities allow them to push boundaries into these futurist realms for a new generation of artists. This organic conversation between two creatives also serves as an interesting outlier within Sawayama's very strategic personal narratives that are often compressed into two to three sentence quotes that frame the biography section of typical profile formats. In this casual interview filmed on a tripod in Formichetti's apartment, Sawayama's demarcation as a futurist artist is very much a construction of her own, implicated in her nonnormative boundary-pushing hybrid art.

Returning to her construction by fashion and popular culture press outlets, Sawayama is quite conscious of her construction as an Eastern body in a Western industry. It is due to past experiences with racist and reductive essentialisms that Sawayama strategically asserts control over her own branding as a hybrid artist within marketing tactics and aesthetics. In most of the profile-length features of Sawayama, her J-Pop influences are consistently cited as Utada Hikaru, Morning Musume, and Ringo Sheena. These musical citations are deliberate in multiple ways, as they illustrate the dynamic representations of discursive femininity within an Eastern context, as well as disrupt the

preiously-mentioned essentialized Western stereotypes of geisha sexualization and commodified kawaii cuteness.[199] At the end of Justin Moran's April 2018 article for *PAPER* Magazine, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," there is a list of Sawayama's "karaoke jams" that includes an embedded YouTube link to Utada Hikaru's 1998 video for the song "Automatic." Often cited as a key inspiration due to Hikaru's more androgynous style and R&B flair, this embedded music video further contextualizes the specific cultural references and contemporary negotiations of Sawayama's inspirations, but also purposeful deviations from this moment in Japanese popular music. Sawayama discusses the constant anxiety of commodified stereotypes of her work within the Western music industry, "I have been making sure to not market myself as J-pop…I'm trying to do something new in terms of representation, rather than deliver the same old narrative of what an East Artist could be."[200] Temporality within this *PAPER* Magazine profile is used to establish old tropes of East Asian representation in Western industries. Sawayama then reclaims these stereotypes through purposeful and politically charged appropriations of style, sound, and content that she then attributes to a very specific group of past Eastern artists. Through stories of racist modeling jobs like the one mentioned in the *i-D* video profile as well as experiences of other Eastern Asian music artists, Sawayama illustrates the reality of hybrid artists within Western Industries. However, Sawayama reclaims these

[199] Justin T. Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6.
[200] Justin T. Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6.

experiences through the purposeful retelling, or (re)memory, of the past that uses her present music to create a more diverse future for other East Asian women.[201]

These curated influences of her Eastern past also serve a distinct purpose in terms of the gender presentation and Japanese hybrid queerness of which Sawayama projects. Similar to her critical work on the interstitial feelings of digital identity exploration, Sawayama's commentary on essentialized femininity for both her Western and Eastern influences of the past communicate a queer subjectivity. In a *The FADER* Magazine article in which Sawayama's influences are established as Utada Hikaru and Ringo Sheena, but also Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, she remarks that this late 90s and early 2000s moment in pop music was "very heteronormative, but I think the overall end product was joy."[202] Again returning to the music and fashion-based popular press framing of Sawayama as an innovation of the past, this positioning of both her East and West musical influences as distinctly heteronormative further emphasizes the significance of her queerness as a distinct deviation from both of these previous music genres and cultures. This July 2018 *The FADER* article further frames this innovation of previous musical styles through hybrid cultural negotiations of past and present within futurist potentialities by deliberately pointing to the representational strategies of Sawayama's work and subsequent position within the music industry.

> Rina is determined to ascend the ranks without succumbing to the 'Japanese pop artist = J-Pop' pigeonhole. 'I want to break records as an East Asian person in the pop industry in the Western world,' she explains matter-of-factly. 'I wanna do it

[201] "i-D Meets: Rina Sawayama," YouTube video, posted by "i-D," October 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbtd86HMdKM&t=203s.
[202] Steffanee Wang, "We're Rooting for Rina Sawayama and You Should Be Too," *The FADER*, July 10, 2018, https://www.thefader.com/2018/07/05/rina-sawayama-cyber-stockholm-syndrome-rina-interview.

> for the next generation of people, especially in East Asian cultures, so when they're like, 'Mom, I want to be a musician; I want to be a popstar,' the [response is] not, 'What the fuck are you talking about?'[203]

It is clear through this quote, as well as several other moments of Sawayama's popular press interviews that she does not shy away from speaking to the representational goals of her work. This strategic negotiation of J-Pop's pasts serves as both authentic sonic and aesthetic inspiration as well as a strategic differentiation from these more essentialized and stereotypical musical citations enforced by the contemporary Western music industry. Through a constant and consistent discussion of these industry-based regulations of her identity and art, Sawayama's personal narrative creates a strategic counterdiscourse that highlights the inherent tensions of being a hybrid figure in Western cultural industries. In repeatedly discussing these issues through dynamic, interwoven temporalities of her life narrative and previous various industry experiences, Sawayama's counterdiscourse uses these Japanese trailblazers of the past to assert her nonnormative positionality in the present for the purpose of imagining a more inclusive representative potentialities for a new generation of Asian pop musicians.

It is also within the music and fashion-based coverage of these dynamic frameworks of hybrid temporalities and cultural negotiations that the subtext of queerness similarly communicates a futurity through implication. In much of the framing of her traumatic experiences of oppressive whiteness at Cambridge, Sawayama recounts her

[203] Steffanee Wang, "We're Rooting for Rina Sawayama and You Should Be Too," *The FADER*, July 10, 2018, https://www.thefader.com/2018/07/05/rina-sawayama-cyber-stockholm-syndrome-rina-interview.

finding solace in the local queer art community.[204] Similarly, her aesthetic choices are framed as strategic symbols of her deviations from essentialized Eastern femininity in a Western industry, but also purposeful alignment with a certain type of Western discursive queerness. In an interview with European independent music publication *Crack* magazine, Sawayama discusses how she uses her own image as a tool against patriarchal, Western standards of beauty. She claims, "challenging ideas of beauty is important to me…When you change your look you are challenging other people's idea of you…even little observations such as how your appearance can challenge femininity, that was definitely a factor in my decision to have shorter hair."[205] In conjunction with other comments about her purposeful rejection of kawaii cuteness as a Western construct of commodified Eastness, Sawayama presents a version of discursive femininity that determines much of the artistic framing of her image as inherently queer. Here, Sawayama's image and words function to create a distinctly hybrid text of queer subjectivity through her articulations, but also distinct deviations from her East Asian and Western pop influences of the past.

In this early coverage of her life narrative, the negotiations of her Eastern heritage within Western upbringing and later Western fashion and music industries provides the context of bullying and alienation from structures of British patriarchy as the impetus for looking inward and finding a community of queer individuals through art. Further, in recognizing the privilege of knowledge and creativity that her hybrid identity allowed her

[204] Felicity Martin, "Pixelated People: Rina Sawayama Interviewed," *Clash Magazine*, August 08, 2018, https://www.clashmusic.com/features/pixelated-people-rina-sawayama-interviewed.
[205] "Rina Sawayama Uses Her Hyper-digital Style as IRL Armour," *Crack Magazine*, 2018, https://crackmagazine.net/article/aesthetic/aesthetic-rina-sawayama/.

to simultaneously embody, the academically driven work of Sawayama's lyrics is also the result of these creative and positive influences of both her Japanese heritage and Western upbringing. In this narrative there is no one moment of interpellation, but a dynamic story that traverses temporal markers of cultural negotiations, systematic oppressions, internal exploration, and community collaboration through the various influences that both her heritage and upbringing have evoked in her life. As all of these moments of bullying, exploration, and creative community are coded as queer through implications of difference, but also through outright language such as "group of really queer, weird people," the cultural hybridity of East and West also speaks from a perspective of gender and sexuality in nuanced and mostly unspoken ways.[206] Once Sawayama comes out as pansexual in the media however, this narrative of East Asian heritage comes in conflict with her present queer identity, yet another narrative of difference for her music to tackle.

## SAWAYAMA'S QUEERNESS AS REPRESENTATIONAL DIFFERENCE

In conjunction with the release of her single "Cherry," Sawayama officially came out to the public as pansexual in late August 2018 through a profile-length piece in *Broadly*, another Vice Media vertical. Sawayama's post-coming out coverage in *Broadly* serves as a key illustration of, but also challenge to, the primary argument of this chapter. In the previously compared coverage of Sawayama's work in Vice Media's music-based online vertical *Noisey* and her video interview with Vice Media's fashion and popular culture publication *i-D*, *Broadly* is another example of this media company's creative audience

[206] Felicity Martin, "Pixelated People: Rina Sawayama Interviewed," *Clash Magazine*, August 08, 2018, https://www.clashmusic.com/features/pixelated-people-rina-sawayama-interviewed.

nichification strategy. Instead of highlighting various sectors of the entertainment industry, however, *Broadly* is explicitly "dedicated to covering gender and identity."[207]

Launched in 2015 as a "women's interests" channel, *Broadly* has since expanded to highlight "the stories that often go uncovered by mainstream media, and interrogate the structural failings that contribute to that erasure."[208] On May 6th 2019, VICE.com announced that Broadly would be joining "the rest of the VICE network" as a part of the online vertical's new mission of expansion to a "platform more widely focused on gender and identity."[209] I use the exact words of *Broadly*'s Lindsay Schrupp because I find the language particularly telling of a broader cultural landscape where various media companies are expanding upon their audience reach to target queer readers as a demographic and market category through identity-based online verticals that purport to expand the scope of the parent publication. [210] In doing so, these verticals often sideline and essentialize complex issues of structural inequality into discernable identity categories. Particularly of note with the specific example of *Broadly* is that it took over three years for the publication to join the larger VICE.com and only after its expansion into broader issues of "gender and identity" such as reproductive health legislation, the transgender military

[207] Lindsay Schrupp, "Broadly Is Joining the New VICE.com," *Vice*, May 6, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mb8vnx/broadly-editors-letter.
[208] Lindsay Schrupp, "Broadly Is Joining the New VICE.com," *Vice*, May 6, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mb8vnx/broadly-editors-letter.
[209] Lindsay Schrupp, "Broadly Is Joining the New VICE.com," *Vice*, May 6, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mb8vnx/broadly-editors-letter.
[210] Other examples of this trend are *Billboard*'s *Billboard Pride*, which started annual North American Pride month coverage that featured LGBTQ music talent and became a full-time mainstay in June 2017, as well as Conde Nast's *them.* which launched in October 2017 with prominent trans and queer journalist Meredith Talusan, Phillip Picardi, and Tyler Ford at the helm.

ban, "women's rights post #MeToo," and "stories on queer identity and sexual exploration."[211]

Through this short summary of the publication's mission and readership, it is abundantly clear that gender-based issues within the scope of this online vertical are all stories and issues that don't center cis-gender heterosexual males. It is also clear through Sawayama's coverage across a range of Vice Media properties that other verticals such as *Noisey* and *i-D* cover, and with nuance, queer works, artists, and communities, but I argue there is a particular shift in rhetoric and framing when identity is at the forefront of a publication's brand and primary readership classification. Further, it is indicative that even though journalist and editors at *Noisey* and *i-D* have a continuing relationship with Sawayama as indicated by her previous coverage, the VICE.com team at *Broadly* is the vertical that gets her "coming out" story. For the sake of this chapter, this background is important particularly because it serves as compelling context of which to trace Sawayama's coverage across a range of Vice Media properties to illustrate the ways that her music, race, and queerness structure her pre- and post-coming out coverage while also representing larger trends of this contemporary moment in online journalism and queer representation in mainstream media outlets.

In the *Vice* article "Rina Sawayama is Ready to Rep her Pansexuality" that accompanied her song "Cherry," Sawayama once again asserts her political subjectivity and argues that she felt it was necessary to articulate her queerness so other queer Asian

[211] Lindsay Schrupp, "Broadly Is Joining the New VICE.com," *Vice*, May 6, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mb8vnx/broadly-editors-letter.

girls would feel represented.[212] Remarking on the past queer subjectivity of her music, "I've always written songs about girls. I don't think I have ever mentioned a guy in my songs, and that's why I wanted to talk about it."[213] In this way, the framing of her as a queer pop artist is no different than the articles that privilege her role as an East Asian musician in a Western industry. Similar to her profile-length pieces in *Noisey* and *i-D*, Sawayama discusses her internalized shame of being a child of a Japanese immigrant, financial struggles during her adolescence, as well as experiences of alienation and depression during her time at Cambridge. However, Sawayama's life narrative is now further contextualized through moments of queer experimentation during her youth where her mother found her kissing another girl, feelings of sexual undesirability throughout most of her life, as well as more deliberate descriptions of her queer artistic community that provided much needed comfort during her experiences of bullying and abuse at Cambridge.[214] These personal anecdotes illustrate the hybrid intersections of Sawayama's various axes of class, race, and sexuality difference through these more directly queer retellings of her past experiences with British cisheteropatriarchy that are similar, but also critically different, to the *Noisey* and *i-D* profiles.

In centering her pansexuality through this specific "coming-out" moment, the temporality of this life narrative as told through queerness seems to create a binary of past

[212] Zing Tsjeng, "Singer Rina Sawayama Is Ready to Rep Her Pansexuality," *Vice*, August 14, 2018, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/zmkgyx/rina-sawayama-comes-out-pansexual-interview.
[213] Zing Tsjeng, "Singer Rina Sawayama Is Ready to Rep Her Pansexuality," *Vice*, August 14, 2018, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/zmkgyx/rina-sawayama-comes-out-pansexual-interview.
[214] Zing Tsjeng, "Singer Rina Sawayama Is Ready to Rep Her Pansexuality," *Vice*, August 14, 2018, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/zmkgyx/rina-sawayama-comes-out-pansexual-interview.

and present whereas queerness's past is colored by her experiences of abuse and shame and the present is full of creativity and community. The article briefly mentions the "late 90s format" and particularly how Sawayama seeks to disrupt the assumed "me and this boy and the boy breaks my heart" narrative structure of these beloved songs of her childhood, but fails to mention her experiences with racism in the industry or the specific cultural implications of her work that explores digital anxieties.[215] Sawayama's life narrative, within the linear temporal framings of this profile, does not discuss the complex cultural negotiations of East and West's pop music pasts, nor does the author significantly reckon with the thematic content of Sawayama's lyrics and music video aesthetics. This type of temporal linearity implies a progress narrative within Sawayama's life as confused early childhood, shameful and closeted adolescence, and now open and expressively "queer" adulthood. No longer does the queer subjectivity of her work dictate a disjunctive temporality of past musical styles and thematic innovation of pop music form, as her queerness is now framed in binaries of pre- and post- coming out. This temporal linearity obscures and flattens her other articulations of queerness through her culturally specific work rooted in discursive Japanese female J-Pop stars of the past, as well as queer icons of the early aughts like Spears, and contemporary articulations of digital identity exploration and community formation.

Further supporting the linearity of this article's temporality, this *Broadly* profile ends with a description of Sawayama's ambitions for the future: "'I think it's possible to

[215] Zing Tsjeng, "Singer Rina Sawayama Is Ready to Rep Her Pansexuality," *Vice*, August 14, 2018, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/zmkgyx/rina-sawayama-comes-out-pansexual-interview.

queer the world with pop music,' Sawayama adds…'I think as a collective force, it's possible to infiltrate the mainstream with queerness, rather than just be buried deep underground.' Given that Sawayama is now part of those ranks, I don't think it'll take long."[216] In a quippy and optimistic ending her article, Zing Tsjeng implies that the queered future is near and inevitable, whereas Sawayama constructs her mainstream appeal as the indicator of this achievement of this imaginative and queer futurity. Quite different from the *Noisey* and *i-D* profiles that frame Sawayama's futurity in her innovation of form and aesthetic that construct her work as futuristic imagination through her contemporary meditations of culture, identity, and technology, Sawayama's future in this profile as framed within this "coming out" moment is predicated upon qualifications of visibility and industry acknowledgement as the progressive byproducts of this queer artistic sensibility. Queerness is no longer a nonnormative subjectivity or discursive tool of temporal deconstruction, but a definable, ontological categorization of sexuality and being. This outright interpellation removes the dynamic and hybrid temporality of Sawayama's work and performance to instead root all applicability within only present implications and contemporary understandings of identity.

This example is not to argue that queerness must be an implication in order to hold political resonance or power, but to instead pinpoint the differences in popular press coverage when identity politics becomes the central framing device of artists' relationship to culture and the industry. Further, within the context of the linearity of this profile's

[216] Zing Tsjeng, "Singer Rina Sawayama Is Ready to Rep Her Pansexuality," *Vice*, August 14, 2018, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/zmkgyx/rina-sawayama-comes-out-pansexual-interview.

temporal construction, this queer future is depicted as inevitable due to prevalent ideologies of neoliberal individualism and identity politics of cultural visibility that highlights a choice few as an indication of "progress." This ideology does not exist only within online identity-based verticals owned by media companies such as Vice Media, but also structures much of the coverage in LGBTQ legacy media outlets like *Gay Times*.

Whereas Sawayama illustrates discomfort and confusion in her industry label as "the future of pop" in *Interview* magazine's December 2017 piece and *PAPER* magazine's Justin Moran in April 2018, by March 2019 Sawayama appears in a full-length feature by *Gay Times* magazine with the headline "Rina Sawayama is the future of queer pop."[217][218][219] This *Gay Times* feature is significant not only in its indication of a different form of Sawayama's construction and identification as the future of pop, but also because this profile is largely representative of Sawayama's coverage post-coming out as pansexual. While notions of past pop music influences serve to articulate present differences for the purpose of a more radical and inclusive future has always been the implicit narrative throughout Sawayama's deliberate deconstruction of millennial and East Asian stereotypes in the media, this demarcation of as the future of *queer* pop illustrates a shift from the implicit queer subjectivity of her work to the deliberate categorization of identification as a queer East Asian artist. Therefore, Sawayama's representational difference is now

[217] Thomas Clarke, "Is Rina Sawayama the Future of Pop?" *Interview Magazine*, November 30, 2017, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/rina-sawayama-pop-future.
[218] Justin T. Moran, "Karaoke With Pop's Next Big Star: Rina Sawayama," *PAPER*, April 25, 2018, http://www.papermag.com/rina-sawayama-karaoke-2563226483.html?rebelltitem=6#rebelltitem6.
[219] Daniel Megarry, "Rina Sawayama Is the Future of Queer Pop," *Gay Times*, March 22, 2019, https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/120247/rina-sawayama-is-the-future-of-queer-pop/.

privileged over her futurity as articulated by innovation in style, content, and sound. Both temporally and representationally, these constructions reduce the hybridity of Sawayama's music, videos, and celebrity persona to distinct moments of interpellation. Through this transition in coverage, Sawayama's performative, disjunctive otherness becomes subsumed by and secondary to the ontological identification of identity politics and representational difference.

In "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: 'The Contradictory, Stony Ground…,'" James Clifford complicates the continuous "hooking and unhooking, remembering and forgetting, gathering and excluding of cultural elements" that construct the fraught processes of identity formation.[220] Obviously aware of the ways that "narrowly defined and aggressively sustained" categories of self and social participation can erase more complex and "inclusive solidarities," Clifford cautions against a reductive identity politics that misses the "complex volatility, ambivalent potential, and historical necessity" of contemporary social movements around identity and culture.[221] More or less echoing the dire implications of Drichel's theorizations of atemporal essentializations of identity, the static and reductive nature of identity politics is once again framed as the antithesis to nuance and intersectionality. While this *Gay Times* profile discusses the role of the internet in producing anxieties of identity exploration, industrial stereotypes of East Asian artists in Western industries, and the commodification of queer subjectivities, this article fails to

[220] James Clifford, "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: 'The Contradictory, Stony Ground…,'" in *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie (Verso), pp. 94-112, 97.
[221] Clifford, "Taking Identity Politics Seriously," 95.

demonstrate the interplay of past, present, and future within Sawayama's lyrical and aesthetic content. As these formal qualities dictate other popular press framings of her inherent futurity in the innovation of pop music genre, "the future of queer pop" obviously has a much different meaning and set of criteria as "the future of pop" held more generally within non-LGBTQ specific publications. LGBTQ publications like *Gay Times* highlight queer artists in the industry through their profiles and up-to-date coverage of popular culture as it relates to queer audiences. In this process of recognition however, these artists' identification takes center stage.

The *Gay Times* piece does not treat Sawayama's queerness as completely a-temporal, as conversations of the constantly evolving nature of gender and sexual identity characterize parts of the conversation surrounding her coming out as pansexual. Similar to much of her earlier coverage's discussions of the complicated feelings of being a queer child of immigrants coming of age in a Western world, Sawayama explains how she still deals with much of her internalized homophobia.[222] Returning back to conversations of repressed pasts in her life narrative of lived difference, queerness here is framed as oppositional to a form of heteronormativity that is firmly rooted in both her Eastern family and Western adolescence. Whereas temporality in life narrative as it relates to Sawayama's heritage finds a power in reclaiming her Japanese childhood, her experiences as a queer youth in these cultures does not have a positive connotation of which to pull inspiration. Instead, these past experiences are framed as times of shame, a culturally enforced shame

[222] Daniel Megarry, "Rina Sawayama Is the Future of Queer Pop," *Gay Times*, March 22, 2019, https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/120247/rina-sawayama-is-the-future-of-queer-pop/.

of queerness from both her Eastern parents and Western environment. While these past experiences of queer desire were at play in her fandom and connection with this heteronormative Y2K Pop and 90s J-Pop, these connections are not explicitly made in these popular press articles. Therefore, Sawayama's queerness, as privileged in these later features, examines her work from the present and only from the present. Here, temporality does not enable a queer subjectivity like it did in previous iterations of her music and fashion-specific popular press coverage, instead time works as a mechanism of denial of the closeted past to only look towards the openly queer future.

These two examples illustrate the ways that interpellation sometimes operates as reductive framing device in identity-based journalism and coverage of queer artists and their work. While in these articles Sawayama is still seen as the future of pop, her work is positioned as futuristic only because of its representational disruption of the present and her implications of a more progressive future of queer visibility. Whereas the temporally disjunctive interplay of past styles of music works to queer fixed, a-temporal notions of stereotypes of lazy, self-obsessed millennial generation and essentialized East Asian femininity, the central framing of her queerness within these later features on Sawayama roots her work within its current representational importance within the music industry. In treating her queerness as a fixed, ontological definition of being within the music industry therefore removes the constantly evolving performativity of her work and therefore, only imagines her work's potentiality as a future of representation and not a future of innovation and musical style. This section of the chapter does not seek to make value or utility judgements of these type of representations and popular press constructions, but to

illustrate the various ways that queer artists, regardless of the inherent disruptions or deconstructions of their dynamic work, are continuously interpellated and often defined by their sexual or nonnormative gender identity within mainstream press. Identity-based online verticals illustrate the complicated implications of this interpellation, as community-formation and the collectivity of identity politics unites groups of artists, fans, promoters, and journalist around these queer works but also occasionally reduces the ideological and performative potentials of certain artists' queer imaginations.

## SAWAYAMA'S DISIDENTIFICATIONS AS POST-TEENY COUNTERPUBLICITY

These performances of disidentification within mainstream systems of promotion present dynamic questions for this contemporary moment of popular music culture and queerness. This tactical misrecognition within the context of Sawayama's popular press coverage is her response to the tensions between the framing devices of reductive multiculturalism that are inherent within these identity-based pieces and the disjunctive temporal hybridity of her performance and lived reality. It is through these strategic negotiations that Sawayama asserts the queerness of her work and her interstitial position within the music industry. This chapter does not aim to argue that mainstream representations of queerness or queer art can never capture the discursivity, or performativity, of that work, but instead wishes to illuminate the strategies I understand to represent Sawayama's larger Post-Teeny scene's complicated negotiations with the dominant public and regulating discourses of industry. This Post-Teeny scene's strategic interventions within the mainstream creates a counterpublic whose disidentificatory

practices' use-value is "only accessible through the transformative politics that it enables subjects and groups to imagine."[223] It is my objective with this discourse analysis of a contemporary artist to illustrate the various ways this music scene is queering the present through their negotiations with past musical styles that create an imaginative counterpublic pushing towards a utopian future. In examining the way the promotional logics of contemporary popular press structures the cultural climate of these artist's circulation and construction, this chapter illustrates the possible limits to disidentificatory practices while also asserting the various strategies artists can take to create a generative counterpublic that provides the space to imagine a larger networked digital community and a more expansive queer future. As an independent hybrid musician of global fame, Sawayama works as a crucial case study to explore this music scene's disidentificatory practices within mainstream logics of promotion and transnational cultural circulations. These strategies take a much more direct, community-based approach through my local and trans-local understandings of p1nkstar's trans*media networks of connectivity in chapter three.

[223] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 179.

## Chapter Three: The Futurities of Networked (Re)memory: Virtual Co-Production in the Trans*Media World-Building of p1nkstar

As explored in the introduction of this project, the origin of music scene theory is much indebted to Will Straw's 1991 "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change." Building upon this text, Holly Kruse's 1993 "Subcultural identity in alternative music culture" and Barry Shank's 1994 *Dissonant Identities: The Rock and Roll Scene in Austin, TX* discuss the ways trans-local music cultures present interesting phenomena of local-global interchange where geographically disparate music cultures share an understanding of style, genre, and appropriate modes of consumption.[224] As this chapter engages directly with Austin-TX based performance artist p1nkstar, beginning with a reference to Shank's work serves dual purposes. First, I acknowledge the other scholarly work on Austin's vibrant local music culture that predates and contributes to p1nkstar's network of performers, DJs, promoters, and activist organizations. Yet, Shank's book also presents epistemological tensions of subcultural theory's reliance on modernist understandings of authenticity, truth, and physicality. In her ambivalent appropriation of a genre conventionally understood through its hyper-commercialization and industry-mediated inauthenticity, p1nkstar and her fellow creatives' critical celebration of early aughts teenybopper pop within practices of community-building disrupts these binaries of study through performances of (re)memory within a variety of transmedia digital spaces. While music scene theory conceptualizes the temporal and performative nature of contemporary cultural afflictions

[224] Christopher Driver and Andy Bennett, "Music Scenes, Space and the Body," *Cultural Sociology* 9, no. 1 (2014): pp. 99-115, https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975514546234, pg. 102.

inherent within the ephemerality of post-subcultural sites, their objects of focus still rest upon patriarchal understandings of musical style and taste cultures that qualify and define scenic participation.[225] This Post-Teeny scene presents a challenge to these academic focuses through a queer sensibility that purposely toys with these concepts of musical meaning. Postmodern performance practice permeates through this scene's articulations of camp, collaborative co-production, and virtual connectivity that understands both physical and digital engagement with community as the primary driver of their performance and artistic practice.

Referring to his own 2004 work, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, that first established the definition of virtual music scenes, Bennett explains that as, "the internet becomes an important new medium for forms of musicalized association, the physical…forms of interaction that characterize the local scene [are] being replaced with new forms of interaction that centre primarily on articulations of knowledge, taste and authority."[226] Built upon these disciplinary perspectives and foundational approaches, Bennett and Peterson's 2004 post-structuralist understandings of cultural identity and musical participation within the digital age still center on the same perimeters of subcultural taste and authenticity that tethers any virtual permutation of a music community to the cultural and geographic specificity of the local. Since 2004, however, there has been minimal scholarship on virtual music scenes and their contributions to popular music

[225] Driver and Bennett, "Music Scenes, Space and the Body," 104-105.
[226] Driver and Bennett, "Music Scenes, Space and the Body," 103.

culture, further emphasizing the privileging of the local and translocal within this scope of study as well as the importance of this chapter's intervention.

While contemporary music scene theory argues that a specific culture of music participation is co-produced by artists, fans, promoters, venues, and other industry actors, the sociological perspective of these scholars treats the production of the music object as secondary to the methods of individual and collective consumption. This chapter instead, explores the ways virtual co-production of music, video art, and spaces of digital fan engagement argues for the increased consideration of virtuality as fundamental within contemporary studies of local and trans-local music cultures. In p1nkstar's work there exists the capacity to challenge the hierarchy and flow of local, translocal, and virtual music scenes implicit within the discipline's previous conceptualizations and operationalizations of these cultural formations. To illustrate the ways that musical meaning and participation within this larger music scene is created, sustained, and circulated through virtual co-production, this chapter explores the transmedia storytelling, transnational community building, and embodied performance practice of local Austin, TX pop artist p1nkstar.

## VIRTUAL MUSIC SCENE TECHNOLOGY AND VIRTUAL CO-PRODUCTION

Attempting to modernize his approach to virtual music scenes, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers explore more contemporary iterations of virtual scenes in Chapter 7, "Virtuality: Images and the Local Archive," of their 2016 book on music scenes and cultural memory. Obviously, participatory online platforms such as peer-to-peer MP3-sharing and social media technologies have completely altered the affordances and

possibilities of sustaining and creating interactions within and through the virtual. In unpacking the ways that Facebook and YouTube structure consumer engagement with various virtual music scenes, Bennett and Rogers argue for understanding "the virtual layer as a topography" of trans-local music cultures.[227] This virtual layer is "trans-local by default" and is crucial to the conception of contemporary music scene participation. Mapping the various networks of consumers through social media affordances of the two aforementioned platforms, Bennett and Rogers's virtual topographies are attuned to more contemporary technologies as compared to previous music scene scholarship, yet still rests on Bennet and Peterson's initial theorization from 2004. Supplementary to or only used to highlight further contours of the larger trans-local scene, the virtual components of music scene theory within the study of popular music culture, "still assists and mimics rather than seriously presents itself as a replacement" to physical cultures of musical participation.[228] Bennett and Rogers, therefore, only understand virtuality through the individual consumption and collective circulation, not collaborative or co-production, of popular music.

Virtual co-production of music objects is a well-explored topic of popular music studies, specifically from fan studies perspectives. Nancy Baym's early work on Swedish independent music fandom argues that fans create systems of two-way collaborations often acting as publicist promoters, archivists, and historians of certain musical acts.[229] This line

[227] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, 157.
[228] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, 159.
[229] See: Baym (2007), Baym and Burnett (2009).

of inquiry eventually leads to her 2018 book, *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*. While an important text that conceptualizes the stage, the merchandise table, and social media as various spaces of audience connection and co-production of musical meaning through an artists' storytelling, much of her argument relies on the communicated authenticity of a certain song or artist persona.[230] The Post-Teeny approach to (re)memory asks the audience to suspend disbelief within a performance of hyper-pop speculative fiction where artificiality creates an expansive playground of imagination. Embracing this mode of hyper-construction requires both an acknowledgement and dismissal of authenticity to relish in the critically euphoric potentialities of this scene's self-aware consumption of falsity.

Authenticity, ownership, and authorship also permeates through Antoni Roig and Gemma San Corenlio's "Reading Songs, Experiencing Music: Co-creation, Materiality, and Expertise in Beck's Song Reader." Through a detailed case study of Beck Hansen's *Song Reader*, an interactive promotional campaign that Roig and Cornelino presents as a "co-creative experiment," the authors explore the various technologies such as music videos, fan art, and organizations of concerts and exhibitions that are the result of Beck's distribution of his sheet music within digital participatory frameworks.[231] While a much different form of virtual co-production, primarily because Beck's *Song Reader* requires participants to read and translate sheet music, the fan responses used by this article reinstate

[230] Nancy K. Baym, *Playing to the Crowd Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).
[231] Antoni Roig and Gemma San Cornelio, "Reading Songs, Experiencing Music: Co-Creation, Materiality, and Expertise in Beck's Song Reader," in *Networked Music Cultures*, ed. Raphaël Nowak and Andrew Whelan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 95-112, 97.

authority, musical expertise, and hierarchical taste values that are often positioned against the "homogenous mainstream pop scene dominated by a market-oriented perspective."[232] These hierarchical taste judgements that differentiate music as "indie" is based within outdated understandings of music cultures that assume anything "pop" is inherently tied to large record labels or massive promotional cycles. Further, Roig and Cornelino's piece places some inherent truth or value judgement with Beck's original songs that treat fan recreations as only legitimate through perceived musical expertise or semi-professional training. Whereas Baym attempts to de-centralize the song or album as the origin of creativity an artists' storytelling by mentioning the merchandise table or social media as spaces of connection, she also builds upon a history of popular music fan scholarship based around perceived authenticity and authorship that creates these affective spaces of musical co-participation and connection between fans and artists. This Post-Teeny scene, very much influenced by this moment in the music industry, shifts the value of truth and musical authenticity typically held within artists' original songs to instead value the virtual co-production as forms of digital engagement and networked connectivity.

There are multiple examples that point to various members of this Post-Teeny scene's innovation of digital engagement, such as Dorian Electra producing an entire song over Instagram live stream, taking input for lyrics and various chord progressions from the comments section. [233] But, the use of Stems is a more common form of engagement across

[232] Roig and Cornelio, "Reading Songs, Experiencing Music," 99.

[233] Jael Goldfine, "Dorian Electra Co-Wrote Their New Song With 200 People" (*PAPER*, January 17, 2020), https://www.papermag.com/dorian-electra-2-fast-premiere-2628285821.html?rebelltitem=5#rebelltitem5.

a range of musicians within this scene. In November 2015, computer-based audio production and DJing software manufacturer Native Instruments released their first edition of Stem file creator.[234] Now branded as "STEMS- A FORMAT FOR CREATIVE DJING" is a multi-track audio format that allows users to split a song into four musical elements: drums, bassline, melody, and vocals.[235] This free standalone platform is a recently popularized way of Post-Teeny digital fan engagements. In obscuring the value typically placed within original songs through this program's metaphorical and literal deconstruction of the digital music file, this practice argues for increased disruption and reconstructions of their music by a variety of fans, DJs, and other artists. Dorian Electra, p1nkstar, and 100 Gecs have all shared the STEM files for their latest work and, in doing so, have reposted their favorite remixes.[236][237][238] As record label contracts and publishing deals prevent any signed artists from these strategies, this example still illustrates the DIY ethos of a lot of this scene's artists who value co-production of space and sound as a critical layer of meaning within their music and artistic storytelling.

As discussed in chapter one, the intersections of music scene theory and popular music study's understandings of authenticity construct meaning and value around

234 "Native Instruments Release Free Stem Creator Application," *Sound on Sound*, September 29, 2015, https://www.soundonsound.com/news/native-instruments-release-free-stem-creator-application.
235 "STEMS- About," YouTube, n.d., https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCe5eXAvKJEQ54_0i8sDBDUw/about.
236 Dorian Electra, Twitter Post, January 20, 2020, 5:44 PM, https://twitter.com/DORIANELECTRA/status/1219405317651320832.
237 p1nkstar. Twitter Post. March 16, 2020, 10:25PM, https://twitter.com/p1nkstar_/status/1239757221350834177.
238 Dylan Brady, Twitter Post, July 30, 2020, 7:38, https://twitter.com/dylanbrady/status/1156363443718328320.

inherently patriarchal formations of authority, expertise, and canon. This Post-Teeny scene does not take offense to the classification of pop music as implicit within market-based ideologies, but simply cannot understand the lack of imagination that assumes conformity and homogeneity within these mainstream music forms. Embedded within queerness is the impulse to tear down and make anew, to deconstruct patriarchal notions of truth and value. The Post-Teenys are inherently queer in their campy and irreverent (re)memory of this moment in popular music history that, through a collective multiplicity of perspectives and positionalities, challenges previous modes of thought to reimagine what teenybopper pop music could be in the glittery and calloused hands of the queers. To outline the ways queer and trans perspectives embrace imaginative possibilities through alternative formations of knowledge, I turn to queer and trans scholar's disruptions of popular music studies, music scene theory, technology studies, and performance studies.

## QUEER AND TRANS* PERSPECTIVES ON VIRTUAL WORLD-BUILDING AND NETWORKED MUSIC TECHNOLOGIES

A student and advisee of Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor's work argues for the inherent queerness of music scene theory's postmodern perspectives and poststructuralist approaches to community building and identity. In her book, *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity, and Queer World-Making*, Taylor pushes back against the dominant understanding of virtual music scenes as primarily discussion-based to account for the, "advent of collaborative audio and video performance software that allows people to

generate and perform audio and video over the internet in real time."[239] Particularly influential to the early brainstorming sessions of this thesis project, Taylor's work provides critical queer interventions within music scene theory that discusses music objects, creatives, and fans to illuminate a "queer insurgency against the heterocentric canon of popular music."[240] Taylor's book, similar to this thesis project, understands these disruptions as full of political potential, imagination, and "(re)signification" that defines queer musical production as activism through its world-making operationalization. As she argues for the interwoven understanding of the local, trans-local, and virtual in the early introductions of the book, Taylor's focus on physical club subcultures in Australia and Germany still relegates the virtual components of these local and trans-local cultures to the merely the infrastructural mechanism for globalization and transnational permeations of aesthetics.

Even within nuanced accounts of queer DIY music scenes in a variety of local and trans-local contexts, Taylor's sociological perspective privileges understandings of scenic participation as collaborative consumption that obscures the technological potentials of virtual co-production as integral to the networked connectivity of contemporary music scenes. In focusing mostly on articulations of queer sexualities, Taylor's work also sidelines discussions of gender and embodiment to various articulations of drag performance or femme and butch sexuality as a form of self-presentation and identity. This perspective warrants further scholarly investigation and specific application of trans*

[239] Taylor, *Playing It Queer*, 60.
[240] Taylor, *Playing It Queer*, 3.

perspectives within understandings of technology and music scene theory. As a multimedia performance and pop music artist, p1nkstar's use of technology as storytelling unfolds through a variety of transmedia objects. In his July 2011 blogpost, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," Henry Jenkins argues that, "transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of fiction get dispersed systematically across a multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience."[241] This chapter, therefore, centers on the co-production of queer and trans* multimedia music objects themselves, but also explores the way that Taylor's "queer world-making" can express itself through virtual potentials for local, translocal, and transnational community-building through performances of musical transmedia storytelling.

Understanding that trans* approaches to the conceptualization and operationalization of technologies is a dense and endlessly generative field of study, I wish to focus my engagement with "technology" within the ways scholars have employed these platforms and affordances within the production and consumption of music. Raphaël Nowak and Andrew Whelan's 2016 edited collection *Networked Music Cultures: Contemporary Approaches, Emerging Issues* argues that digitality, "creates connections, networks and links between individuals, structured soundscapes, protocols and processes; and it is interwoven with and embedded within cultural contexts and routine practices."[242]

241 Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," Henry Jenkins, August 1, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.
242 Raphaël Nowak and Andrew Whelan, *Networked Music Cultures: Contemporary Approaches, Emerging Issues* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

This quote provides the basis for Nowak and Whelan's understanding of the everyday, or mundane, associations of digital technologies and music that, "must be read critically against multiple sites, scales and disciplinary matrices: technologically, aesthetically, socially, legally, historically and so on."[243] This mostly theoretical application of digital music presents a dynamic framework to critique their use of technology as only material and infrastructural, based within platform affordances or user engagements and not necessarily understood as systems of power and societal regulations of capitalism and the state.

Separating "technologically" as its own axes of analysis within scholarly understandings of digital music cultures seems to argue that social uses, legal implications, and historical contexts don't already affect the development, design, and operationalization of various platforms and their subsequent affordances. While not explicitly technologically determinist, I do wish to challenge Nowak and Whelan's separation of "technologically" as a category of influence within the operationalization of digital music cultures. This is particularly relevant in relation to the various trans* embodiments and interwoven uses of technologies inherent within this Post-Teeny scene's virtual network of queer co-production. Whereas a queer perspective deconstructs hierarchies of music scene flows, trans* utilizations and critiques of technologies illustrates another discursive layer of this music scene's performance practice and virtual co-production.

[243] Nowak and Whelan, *Networked Music Cultures*, 5.

In the 2013 introduction of *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura provide a brief overview of the development of the field since the publishing of the first reader in 2006. Stryker and Aizura concisely present the broad range of ideological and political implications of transgender studies as,

> There are many transgenders- critical, queer, feminist, transnational, local, identitarian, institutional- and many of them seem politically promising. However much transgender, like other contemporary categories of identity, operations within neoliberal conditions, it has also offered powerful critiques of both homo- and hetero- nationalisms and normativities, as well as critiques of gender regulation itself as a tool of biopolitical governmentality. However much transgender has been a site of race, class, and anti-colonial struggle, it has also been generative of counter-narratives that imagine alternate, anti-, post- and a-modernities in which bodies can come to mean differently, across a range of bodily differences.[244]

This quote outlines the trans* perspective of this chapter that understands the transmedia, transnational, and transfeminine components of p1nkstar's work as a reorientation of the heterocentrist and masculinist canon of popular music and music scene studies. I do not wish, however, to relegate p1nkstar's highly generative work to merely disciplinary debates of academic study. Instead, my understanding of p1nkstar's work through the valence of queer co-production and trans* networked music technologies allows for a more discursive and politically grounded reading that specifically engages with performance practice as counterimaginative resistances to "the technologies and histories of racial and colonial gendering."[245] These trans* resistances have fruitfully been understood through concepts of embodiment and trans of color performance practices.

[244] Aren Z. Aizura and Susan Stryker, *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 10.
[245] Jian Neo Chen, *Trans Exploits: Trans of Color Cultures and Technologies in Movement* (London: Duke University Press, 2019), 4.

Juilan Gill-Peterson argues in "The Technical Capacities of the Body: Assembling Race, Technology, and Transgender" that the growing ubiquity of technology has prompted media studies to explore race as technology. Building upon the work of Beth Coleman and Wendy Hui Hyong Chun's work that considers race on aesthetic and ethical terms instead of ontologically, Gill-Peterson traces the biopower of the hormone molecule as representative of the political power of medical and social technicities.[246] Gill-Peterson argues through contemporary embodiments of their regulating technologies, that trans and race "carry with them the historically conditioned potentials for retooling the body and the body politic".[247] Similarly, Jian Neo Chen explores the productive and coalitional potentials of trans of color embodiments, "that mobilize potential points of solidarity and kinship between those who experience embodiment as a form of racial gender displacement and subjugation within radically different yet interrelated transnational U.S. histories and systems of genocide, captivity, colonization, and imperialism."[248] To embed these critiques of trans of color uses of technologies with José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentifications that understands queer of color performances as minoritarian resistances to dominant cultures within understandings of popular music culture frameworks, I build upon Jodie Taylor's queer-world making within music scenes to argue that p1nkstar's work creates a trans* world-building.[249] In addition, this work owes inspiration to Raquel

[246] See: Coleman (2009) and Chun (2012).
[247] Julian Gill-Peterson, "The Technical Capacities of the Body: Assembling Race, Technology, and Transgender," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (January 2014): pp. 402-418, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2685660, 415.
[248] Chen, *Trans Exploits*, 4.
[249] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.

Moreira's "Bicha travesti worldmaking: Linn da Quebrada's disidentificatory performances of intersectional queerness."[250] Moreira's uses of Karma Chávez's "embodied translation" and Muñoz's *Disidentifications* is a productive model for conceptualizing transnational exchanges of knowledge through performance.[251] Trans* in the context of this chapter, therefore, serves to properly encompass the transmedia, transnational, and transfeminine components of p1nkstar's work, but also cites a discipline of study rooted in the fundamental upheaval of colonialist technological regimes of racist gendering, state regulation and surveillance, and capitalistic systems of oppression.

Together, these approaches illustrate the ways that technologies and trans* operate simultaneously within embodiments that seek to restructure histories of oppression through performance. Retooling within the context of this Post-Teeny scene, and p1nkstar's work, is a (re)memory of early-aughts pop music frameworks that privileged marketable whiteness, constructed within essentialist notions of femininity and heterosexual desire. Further, with early web-based music technologies launching around the early 1990s and expanding into the beginning precursors to contemporary digital streaming platforms (DSPs) by the early 2000s, this moment in popular music technologies signals a critical transition to the increasing globalization and transnational permeation of music styles,

[250] Raquel Moreira, "Bicha Travesti Worldmaking: Linn Da Quebradas Disidentificatory Performances of Intersectional Queerness," *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture* 4, no. 3 (January 2019): pp. 303-318, https://doi.org/10.1386/qsmpc_00014_1.
[251] Karma Chávez, "Embodied Translation: Dominant Discourse and Communication with Migrant Bodies-as-Text," *Howard Journal of Communications* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): pp. 18-36, https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170802664912.

sounds, and aesthetics.[252] Here, the histories of colonial technologies of Western imperialism such as binary conceptions of racialized gendering intersect with the infrastructural technological dissemination of increasing U.S. popular music market dominance.

Inflecting this call-to-action with Chun's trans of color approach to technological embodiments, this chapter examines the way that the early-aughts popstar as dominant social script of U.S. marketable whiteness, essentialized femininity, and global market dominance acts as a boundary object for p1nkstar's transmedia, transnational, and transfeminine performance art. In treating a genre of popular music often derided for its commercial appeal and assumed inauthenticity with an intellectual awareness for the implicit systems of capital, p1nkstar represents the postmodern queer perspective of this Post-Teeny music scene's performance practice that does not concern itself with the trivial and patriarchal concepts of authenticity, taste cultures, and quality. The future-leaning orientation of this chapter, therefore, is not only due to the imaginative potentials of p1nkstar's work, but also argues for the potentialities of a trans* critique and approach to music scene theory that contributes the academic discourses surrounding popular music studies. Yet again, the work of this music scene provides the intellectual material to challenge dominant systems of thought and this chapter, and this thesis, is indebted to the contributions of these pop music philosophers.

[252] Jeremy Wade Morris, *Selling Digital Music, Formatting Culture* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), Figure 1.

**P1NKSTAR "UR FAV ELECTR0NIC POP SUPERSTAR!"**[253]

As mentioned in the introduction, p1nkstar is an Austin-based transmedia performance artist who was born and raised in Tampico, Mexico. Through her shows, DJ sets, and various hosting gigs, p1nkstar displaces the early aughts popstar as cultural script of assumed femaleness and whiteness through her specific transfeminine and Latina disidentifications within this dominant framework of U.S. celebrity. This displacement is done through strategies of performative contradictions, or as Beth Sullivan from *The Austin Chronicle* describes as a "world via music and conceptual shows mixing saccharine beats with subversive lyrics, tiaras with ball gags, and body hair with hypnotic ponytails…a realm removed from this dimension's binaries."[254] In hosting and DJ-ing various weekly dance parties centering queer POC/Latinx underground music artists around town, curating showcases of queer and femme Austin talent, and merging Austin's performance art scene with the queer nightlife crowd, p1nkstar's emphasis on community-building aligns her most aptly with histories of DIY subcultural art and music practices. Interested in the ways technologies and social media afford and constrain various DIY-articulations and circulations of local arts cultures, however, p1nkstar's work also reaches beyond the Austin-metro area allowing her to perform around various parts of Texas and San Francisco.

[253] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar.

[254] Sarah Marloff, Charlie Neddo, and Beth Sullivan, "How Austin's Queer Community Supports Its Own," Spotlighting the LGBTQ people and orgs looking after our health, youth, elders, and art - Arts - *The Austin Chronicle*, August 10, 2018, https://www.austinchronicle.com/arts/2018-08-10/how-austins-queer-community-supports-its-own/.

Returning to concepts of transmedia narratives, Jenkins further discusses in his "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections" post that transmedia storytelling, "describes one logic for thinking about the flow of content across media" and argues that one text can hold several logics based within branding, performance, ritual, play, or activism.[255] It is because of certain text's ability to present a multiplicity of these logics that "transmedia storytelling is apt to emerge through structures of co-creation and collaboration."[256] I introduce these definitions to assert p1nkstar's storytelling as an embodied transmedia text that exists across a variety of digital platforms that uses logics of branding, activism, and performance to operationalize her trans* world-building and utopic queer (re)memories. The definition of this storytelling as fiction, however, does not capture the nuanced negotiation of imagination and reality at play within p1nkstar's world. Built upon her positionality as a transfeminine and Mexican performance artist, trans of color critique serve as the contextual backbone of her transmedia work. As community-building and activism serve as the impetus for this type of performative critique, the multiple logics of her transmedia storytelling are only possible through a co-production of musical meaning that relies on its realization through physical and virtual scenic participation. The narrativization of p1nkstar transcends the boundaries of fiction to instead speak through and within utopic frameworks that reconstitutes reality through a multi-platform transmedia (re)imagination.

255 Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," Henry Jenkins, August 1, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.
256 Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," Henry Jenkins, August 1, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

Building upon both Jenkins transmedia storytelling logics and their specific application within Jian Neo Chen and Lissette Olivares's survey of Transmedia in the Keywords section of the first edition of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, I understand p1nkstar's transmedia work as, "transforming the relationship between the aesthetics, politics, and technologies of cultural representation."[257] The networked technologies of this Post-Teeny scene, as represented through p1nkstar's negotiation of the local, translocal, and digital world building, also are attuned to "shifting networks of interrelated references, such as masculine and feminine, surface and essence, migrant and citizen; race, region, ethnicity, and nationality; urban, suburban, and rural; post- and nonindustrial."[258] In discussing the various transnational contexts and embodied performance practices of p1nkstar's transmedia logics of branding, activism, and performance, I illustrate the ways that the early-aughts popstar as dominant framework of celebrity functions through the (re)memory of p1nkstar's discursive trans* world-building that further asserts the necessity of the digital within contemporary understandings of music scenes.

## "CERTIFIED P1NKSTAR FAN™"[259] AND THE SUBVERSIVE BRANDING OF (RE)MEMORY

One key aspect of this digital mediation of local queer performance art is p1nksar's patreon page that acts as a half-satirical, half-promotional "virtual fan club" page. Toying with the concept of transmedia branding, p1nkstar's strategic humor and intertextuality of

[257] Jian Neo Chen and Lissette Olivares, "Transmedia," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1-2 (May 2014): pp. 245-248, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400172, 245.
[258] Chen and Olivares, "Transmedia,", 245.
[259] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar.

her Patreon page and short videos establishes her utilization of José Esteban Muñoz's theories of disidentifications to illustrate her unique (re)significations and technological counterimagination of the early-aughts teenybopper popstar. These individual performances of (re)memory then serve as the context of p1nkstar's purposeful strategies of community engagement within Austin and beyond that constitute her virtual trans* world-building potential and specific trans* positionality within this larger Post-Teeny music scene.

Patreon is a membership-based platform where fans pay a monthly fee to the artist-user "in exchange for exclusive access, extra content, or a closer look into their creative journey."[260] I begin with this description from Patreon's "About" page to establish both the brand of this platform that positions users as creators, but to establish the tongue-in-cheek references to this strategic branding that p1nkstar 'queers' through her description of her Patreon-based "virtual fan club." Listed under the one-minute introduction vlog style direct address video, p1nkstar's description of this fan page is:

> *Hiiii CuTieZ!!! Welcum 2 me FAN CLUB!!! — I hope you are ready to experience the magical world of p1nkstar from the first row! By joining* ***P1NKSTAR'S FAN CLUB*** *you will NOT ONLY be aiding in sustaining my creative practice as* ***Austin's Sweetheart and fav electr0nic pop superstar****. As* ***a trade off for your help****, I will be creating eXXXclusive ART and CONTENT that will only be distributed to my most generous fans! I have established several tiers that will get you specific rewards but do NOT let this stop you from donating what you can! Any amount will make you a* ***Certified p1nkstar Fan™*** *! So what are you waiting for?! JOIN MY FAN CLUB TODAY![261]*

[260] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar.

[261] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar, emphasis placed by p1nkstar.

This queered language of Patreon's branding establishes the subversive self-reflectivity and cheeky humor of p1nkstar's work that purposefully deploys a hyperbolic sensibility within the frameworks of celebrity, commodity, and cuteness to displace these referents through a performative absurdity. Toying with the ideas of pre-social media text-based fan forums, or online websites created by record labels as promotional infrastructures of perceived intimacy and connection for pop music fans during the early-aughts, this virtual fan club simultaneously builds the (re)memory of teenybopper's past and storytelling of p1nkstar's persona while also creating a monthly revenue stream from her transmedia art.

As mentioned previously, p1nkstar's reference to this type of text-based forum puts her work in direct conversation with the type of virtual music scenes explored in Bennet and Peterson's 2004 text that established this disciplinary perspective. Looking reflectively on his body of work in his 2016 book with Ian Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Identity*, Andy Bennett states that virtual music scenes in 2004 were predicated, "on platforms such as HTML coded one-to-many websites, listservs, chatrooms and fanzines."[262] This sentence sums up the variety of media objects observed in various virtual music scene chapters of this 2004 edited collection that solidified the disciplinary perspective of music scenes. The "virtual fan club" operates as a referential framework of previous music industry strategies to increase record label capital under the false pretense of intimate fan engagement that is now reframed through p1nkstar's appropriation that instead encourages sustained funding of an independent musician's work within this digital

[262] Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, 140.

platform. In framing this early-aughts strategy of promotion within a cheeky language playing off of the Patreon's "brand mission," p1nkstar's temporally interwoven critique of celebrity uses these outdated modes of pop music marketing to further satirize the creatively entrepreneurial neoliberal individualist ideologies of contemporary micro-celebrities. This mix of irreverent humor and layered references of pop music's past represents the inherently queer deconstructions of p1nkstar's work that through its surface appearance of a silly and absurd performance slyly (re)members distinct moments in time that reformat disciplines of thought through trans* performance of disidentification.

This page also operates as one of the various transmedia objects of p1nkstar's performance art practice. The queer sensibility of this language juxtaposed with the hyper-cute aesthetic of her page creates a visual and textual field of virtuality. Through inflecting a DIY language of "sustaining my creative practice" within satirical reference to microcelebrity frameworks of "eXXXclusive" access and tiered membership categories with early-aughts pop music marketing strategies of text-based fan clubs, p1nkstar illustrates the multiple temporalities, but also multiple levels of local and trans-local music scenes, at play in her transmedia storytelling and virtual trans* world-building. As users are able to message, comment, and download the content from this page, this platform, with all of its neoliberal ideologies, also creates spaces of virtual co-production of meaning within p1nkstar's transmedia storytelling as trans* world-building. The various discourses surrounding p1nkstar's utilization of this platform illustrates a nuanced understanding of past and present branding strategies and promotional tools that, through its (re)memory,

presents the future-oriented potentials of digital fan engagement and virtuality inherent within her performance practice.

## TRANSCENDING SPACE AND PLACE IN (RE)MEMORY'S ACTIVIST LOGIC

p1nkstar explains the origin of her persona, the building blocks of her transmedia logics of trans* world-building through activism, in her video "MY FIRST VLOG EVER!!! 10 Things About Me." In this video p1nkstar explains her real name is P1nky Robinstar, describes her utopic hometown of Rosienton, and traces how she went from being a simple child of a producer/songwriter couple to the massive celebrity of Starrywood she is today. In describing her childhood home of Rosienton as "a small community where we love and support each other," p1nkstar established a utopic past where her creativity and performance aspirations were supported by the people around her. Her experience in this community of support led her to her current home "in Entertainment City in the heart of Starrywood, the capital of the world."[263] Further, she describes her love of Starrywood due to the "great community of artists and friends" who collaborate to "create new things together."[264] In an interview I conducted with p1nky on October 22nd 2019, she mentions a much different personal experience growing up in Tampico, Mexico.[265] Citing the pervasiveness of machismo culture, p1nky argues that her work breaks down these systems of misogyny through transnational online performance that

263 "MY FIRST VLOG EVER!!! 10 Things About Me! | p1nkstar Vlogs," YouTube Video, Posted by "p1nkstar," July 15, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=kcwrVhQmtKQ.
264 "MY FIRST VLOG EVER!!! 10 Things About Me! | p1nkstar Vlogs," YouTube Video, Posted by "p1nkstar," July 15, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=kcwrVhQmtKQ.
265 p1nkstar, interview with author, Austin, October 22, 2019.

celebrates the potentials of the hyper-feminine, hyper-queer, and hyper-sexual.[266] Within this personal context, Rosienton works to reimagine p1nky's past to shift the values inherent in oppressive structures of binaries through p1nkstar's performances of utopia.[267] These realities and imaginations merge to both articulate similarly crucial facets of p1nkstar's interwoven personal life and performance practice. It's within the (re)memory of place (Mexico and Austin) that p1nkstar creates the transnational exchange through concepts of queer utopia that understands the simultaneous existence of local and virtual scene participation as integral to this transmedia narrative and transnational permeation of content. The digital accessibility of this video content, as well as the transmedia storytelling that merges places of p1nkstar's life experiences with spaces of trans* world-building through narrative, illustrates the dynamic negotiation of past and present, local place and transnational space, and reality and imagination that inflects the activism logic of this work.

Constructions of space and activism within p1nkstar's work also extends into frameworks of the local as Starrywood seems an apt description of Austin's support and community that p1nky articulates as crucial to her personal and performance life.[268] In centering her performative reimagination of Starrywood, or Austin, as the entertainment capital of the world, p1nkstar places the creative cultural capital traditionally aligned with New York City or Los Angeles within the context of Austin's expansive and intensely creative queer arts and performance scene. Connecting this storytelling through her work

[266] p1nkstar, interview with author, Austin, October 22, 2019.
[267] It is important to note here that p1nky clarifies that her work does not go against or unilaterally critique her past and Mexican heritage, yet works to undo, or shift, the hierarchies of values placed within various cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity.
[268] p1nkstar, interview with author, Austin, October 22, 2019.

with sexual health clinics, trans and queer activist organizations, and various cultural art collectives within Austin like BossBabesATX and The Museum of Human Achievement, the localized scope of this chapter speaks to both the geographic specificity of her work, but also the community-building impetus that structures and deeply informs her motivations for activism through performance.[269] Describing her experiences within Austin as nothing but full support from venues, local publications, and a network of fellow performers, p1nkstar's admiration for Austin on both a personal and professional level is paid in kindness through her community-building efforts as well as within the intertextual implications of this Starrywood/Austin metaphor.

For p1nkstar and her fellow performers/fans, Austin *is* the queer creative capital of the world and it's through this backstory and her IRL community work that she pays respects to the community that has fully embraced her work. p1nkstar's transmedia work, therefore, speaks through and within her engagements with various Austin-based community organizations that illustrates how her musical meaning is co-produced by members of the community both within her geographic vicinity but also through the expansive virtual network of fellow DJs, producers, fans, and performers. The activist logic of p1nkstar's community-based engagements with geographic place is only fully realized in its storytelling potential through the creation and connection of virtual and metaphorical space of trans* world- building within her performance narrative; and vice versa. This

[269] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar, emphasis placed by p1nkstar.

activist logic is further emphasized through the technological intervention and critique of p1nkstar's (re)memory of the early-aughts popstar.

Fig 3.1 p1nkstar's satire of aethetics in her vlog-style transmedia work (0:05)

This utopic reimagination of her past, in addition to the reclamations of p1nky's personal past, also (re)signifies assumptions the popstar within dominant discourses of popular music's past. Establishing this performance persona as the product of music industry nepotism, p1nkstar declares "I always knew I was going to be a popstar. My daddy is a producer and my mommy is a songwriter so it's in my blood to be creative and a great artist."[270] Through this direct-address vlog-style video that establishes p1nkstar's backstory, the choice of background for this piece presents a satire of aesthetics. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, this room specifically implicates a hyper-feminine youth culture of her favorite color, pink, but also establishes this character as upper-class who has a large flat

[270] "MY FIRST VLOG EVER!!! 10 Things About Me! | p1nkstar Vlogs," YouTube Video, Posted by "p1nkstar," July 15, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=kcwrVhQmtKQ.

screen TV, a connected balcony, and a seating area in her bedroom.[271] Positioned within the DIY art practice of p1nkstar, these alignments with nepotism and wealth are frameworks in which p1nkstar strategically disidentifies with in an effort to satirize the popstar as hyper-commodified framework of white female privilege. It is within these concepts of nepotism, celebrity, and wealth that, to borrow from Muñoz, p1nkstar disrupts and parodies through her video and performance texts to "create critical uneasiness, and furthermore, to create desire within uneasiness."[272] Positioned within statements of love for independent electronic pop music and mutual respect of fellow queer creatives, p1nkstar's "10 Things About Me!" video is an ambivalent satire that represents the dynamic negotiations of underground, or DIY, performance art and music practice within mainstream and commercial frameworks of pop music and internet celebrity. These negotiations, however, are not a necessary evil or creative imposition on p1nkstar's work, but a productive playground of potential (re)significations of this mainstream past.

Similar to the ways Chen's and Chun's work explores how trans performance practices reformat social dominance of white settler colonialism and subsequent technologies and histories of racial and colonial gendering, p1nkstar's (re)memory of the early aughts popstar illustrates how this framework of celebrity is also a technology of inscription based within hegemonic understandings of binarized gender and eurocentrism.[273] As a technology of U.S. music industry hegemony during the early turn

[271] "MY FIRST VLOG EVER!!! 10 Things About Me! | p1nkstar Vlogs," YouTube Video, Posted by "p1nkstar," July 15, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=kcwrVhQmtKQ.
[272] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 115.
[273] Chen, *Trans Exploits*, 4.

of the century transition to digital music commodities, the cultural memory of the popstar as promotional celebrity framework evokes a certain marketable whiteness and essentialist conception of cisgender heteronormative desire as a method of broad global appeal. Through a resignification of this hyper-commercialized symbol of U.S. global music market dominance within a specifically networked DIY approach to virtual community building, p1nkstar cleverly juggles critiques of previous queer and trans exclusions that, through its (re)memory, also presents a celebration of the discursive potentialities of pop music as a space of queer and transnational expression. In this transmedia storytelling that constructs imagined utopias through their connection to local and transnational networks of community building, the activist logic of this storytelling expands possibilities of musical space and virtual scene participation. The transmedia logics of brand-oriented satire and networks of local and transnational activism collide in p1nkstar's embodied performance practice.

## THE POP FUTURITIES OF P1NKSTAR'S (RE)MEMORY PERFORMANCES


Fig. 3.2. "SUPER P1NKSTAR" multimedia co-production (1:06)

As Jenkins mentions in his blogpost "Transmedia 202: Further Reflection", in an ideal world each of these transmedia logics would "make its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story."[274] As a live performer, the subversive branding and dynamically spatial networks of p1nkstar's activism speaks through her performance work. As a sort of culmination of her various transmedia works, p1nkstar's live performances often feature a large projections screen that plays behind her during the live performance sets. The video "SUPER P1NKSTAR" combines skits, experimental video work, and hyper-cute animations to further the narrative of p1nkstar's celebrity within Starrywood. The video begins with p1nkstar's primary collaborator, Y2K, acting as a reporter from Entertainment City (Figure 3.2).[275] In this over the top camp performance, Y2K covers the breaking news of the day- p1nkstar has announced a new set. The trans* world-building of p1nkstar's narrative cannot be separated from the metaphorical alignments of Austin, TX with Starrywood. In beginning her and Y2K's sets with this news broadcast, p1nkstar transports the audience to reimagination of Austin; the way she understands this city as a creative capital of support and the utopia of her own satirical celebrity. Here, p1nkstar reimagines the club space, or various queer venues in Austin where she regularly performs, within the frameworks of her own creation.

[274] Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," Henry Jenkins, August 1, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.
[275] "SUPER P1NKSTAR (PREVIEW)," YouTube Video, Posted "p1nkstar," March 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=474&v=Xm-1QqzoCVA&feature=emb_title.

It is within this storytelling that the textual reimaginations of the past become enacted within the present strategies of performance and activated by trans* world-building potentials of a queerer future. Co-production of this transmedia storytelling therefore encompasses the audience attending the current live performance, but in signaling to this larger networked space of transmedia narrative, everyone in p1nkstar's performance is constructed within the network of Starrywood, or her IRL network of Austin and beyond. The co-production of space within p1nkstar's virtual trans* world-building with fans and producers, as understood through this transmedia storytelling, collides with her local community engagement and transnational performance practice. This relationality of performance, space, and positionality is also illustrated through p1nkstar and Y2K's reference to the artistic and funding support from Mejor Vida Corp (or Better Life Corporation) at the beginning of this video piece.

Mejor Vida Corp is a conceptual art project by Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas that recreates corporate structures to distribute products such as pills, identification cards, and lottery tickets. In mocking both the bureaucratic inefficiencies of the Mexican State who purports to provide social services under the guise of propping up systems of global capitalism, M.V.C. "evidently copies the contemporary structure of the transnational corporation, but radically inverting its economic rationale."[276] These pills, id cards, and lottery tickets are not real but serve to represent various mechanisms of the state services

[276] Minerva Cuevas, "Mejor Vida Corp.," Mejor Vida Corporation: Corporate, n.d., http://www.irational.org/mvc/corpora.html.

that Cuevas argues are tools of corporate and state coercion against the health, safety, and quality of life of the everyday citizen. In Cuevas's own words:

> This is a corporation that recuperates the hopes of a population that has been equally betrayed by the promises of the former social structure of political clientelism and the untenable dreams of world-class development…a timely counter-monument for a cunning postrevolutionary populist regime that seems on the way to vanishing entirely, eroded by the democratic struggles of its population and the unstoppable advance of global capitalism.[277]

As Y2K claims "this episode was brought to you by Mejor Vida Corp- for a human interface", the logo for this corporation and conceptual art piece flashes on the screen.[278] This moment is crucial to p1nkstar's involvement within various art scenes, but also in signaling towards her Mexican heritage and anti-capitalist critiques of the early-aughts popstar. A signal of global capitalism and the mass, commercialized appeal of pop music, the framework of popstar, particularly early-aughts teenybopper iterations such as Britney Spears, can be read as tools of increasing global capitalism and the far reach of U.S. popular music culture. Through p1nkstar's video work and performance art, she deconstructs implications of wealth and commodity that traditionally accompany the star texts of various global popstars, but it is within this reference to M.V.C. that the audience understands this critique also in relation to her Mexican heritage and Latina identity. Building upon p1nkstar's backstory where Rosienton doubles as p1nky's personal experience growing up in Mexico, this connection creates a transnational network of artists sharing and circulating each other's work through critiques of state and capital power. These technological

[277] Minerva Cuevas, "Mejor Vida Corp.," Mejor Vida Corporation: Corporate, n.d., http://www.irational.org/mvc/corpora.html.
[278] "SUPER P1NKSTAR (PREVIEW)," YouTube Video, Posted "p1nkstar," March 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=474&v=Xm-1QqzoCVA&feature=emb_title.

interventions through conceptions of place and space, or local and transnational, are made possible through virtual connectivity and co-production. Further, M.V.C.'s tagline "for a human interface" indicates the systems of racially gendered technologies of colonialist histories of state power, whereas conceptual and performance art imagine a humanity through technology to combat these systems of oppression both within the local context of Starrywood (Austin) and Rosienton (Mexico). In referencing this conceptual activist art at the beginning of her and Y2K's set, p1nkstar metaphorically expands the networked implications of her performance critique through a transnational perspective. Performance art in this sense is not only mode of deconstructive analysis, but a way to assert her transnationality and anti-capitalist critique through her embodiment of this dominant cultural script.

After this brief introduction from Y2K performing as Starrywood news broadcaster, the feed is disrupted by glitches in the system. As the words "desirous" and "virus" flash on the screen, the video art for Y2K's set begins. It is during this set that Y2K performs their song "Access Control." In a mix of sexual innuendos and computational language such as "download me up" and "access control me," Y2K literally merges discourses of erotic desire and computer viruses.[279] Whereas Y2K's performances deserve their own textual reading, I briefly outline the primary theme of this piece because of how it is positioned against p1nkstar's hyper-cute aesthetics. At the end of Y2K's piece, an "Emergency Broadcast System" screen appears and the video cuts to Y2K as reporter Titi

[279] "SUPER P1NKSTAR (PREVIEW)," YouTube Video, Posted "p1nkstar," March 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=474&v=Xm-1QqzoCVA&feature=emb_title.

who explains that someone has hacked into the "database motherboard" of Starrywood to which they exclaim, "I wish we had a superhero to save the day! What's that? Is that a star in the sky? It's a p1nkstar."[280] At this point, p1nkstar comes out on stage to perform her song "P1nkstar!." Positioned as the savior of Starrywood from the evil, disruptive performance of Y2K's erotic virus, p1nkstar's hyper-cute bubblegum pop aesthetic and sound presents a distinct contrast to the harsh glitch house music of Y2K's unabashed sexuality.

The context of these artists as frequent collaborators, however, indicates a mutual co-performance and co-produced objective through their different storytelling mechanisms. The transmedia performance storytelling within this set once again merges discourses of technicity to create juxtapositions between erotic and cute, disruptive and collaborative, glitch and pop to question the boundaries between these classifications. In this narrative, p1nkstar's world is constructed as the hyper-femme using cuteness as a tool of subversive deconstruction of power and hierarchies of desire that are further understood through her contrasting co-production of meaning with collaborator Y2K. The contrast, housed within a campy hyper-cute world of Starrywood, indicates to the audience this mode of performance is parodic and, therefore, necessitates a critical understanding of how p1nkstar creates a strategic performative ambivalence of the early-aughts popstar as dominant cultural script through embodiment.

[280] "SUPER P1NKSTAR (PREVIEW)," YouTube Video, Posted "p1nkstar," March 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=474&v=Xm-1QqzoCVA&feature=emb_title.

I conclude this chapter with an analysis of a p1nkstar set I saw September 8th, 2019 as a part of second annual CYBERBABES event. This queer and femme showcase was the official after-party of local non-profit #bossbabesATX's yearly festival, BABES FEST 2019, that focuses on female and non-binary entrepreneurialism, leadership, and community within the Austin area.[281] "Presented by #bbatx, Y2K Technologies, and p1nkstar, Inc.," this event illustrates the exact co-production of space through local non-profits and transmedia art that permeates throughout p1nkstar's performance practice of trans* world-building.[282] It is within this context that the transmedia logics of p1nksrar's branding and activism come alive through performance that presents future potentials based within queer and trans utopias of pop music's power.

To map these strategies, I draw from Muñoz's understanding of the work of drag superstar Vaginal Creme Davis. This is not to reductively align p1nkstar's transfeminine identity and trans-specific performance art with drag, but to draw out the theoretical frameworks of the "social body" and "tactical misrecognition" with dominant white patriarchal cultural scripts that define Muñoz's account of Dr. Davis's performance practices. Outlining Dr. Davis's performances as "terrorist drag," Muñoz argues Davis disrupts both mainstream cultures that are predicated on reproducing the gender binary, but also challenges the inherent whiteness and cisness of queer modalities of punk performance.[283] Muñoz argues that "disidentifications is a performative mode of tactical

281 "BBATX," BBATX, n.d., https://www.bossbabes.org/.
282 "CYBERBABES: THE BABES FEST EDITION," Do512, n.d., https://do512.com/events/2019/9/8/cyberbabes-the-babes-fest-edition-tickets.
283 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 97.

recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology."[284] This disidentification also creates a third space that is separate from the binaries of identification and counteridentification, or in relation to this specific music scene, resists neat classifications of mainstream and subcultural musics.

In p1nkstar's disidentification with the early aughts popstar as celebrity framework however, the implicit assumptions of hegemonic whiteness, privilege, commodity, and essentialized femininity of this dominant cultural script creates a specific context for her *tactical misrecognition* through embodied performance. Muñoz makes sense of Dr. Davis's embodied, performative disidentificatory practices through Félix Guattari's theorization of the "social body."[285] Guattari argues, similar to Judith Butler's understanding of the temporality of recitative gender performance, that ideas and expressions of feminine and masculine are mapped onto the body through the repetitions and restraints of dominant cultural ideologies. It is through performances like Dr. Davis's and p1nkstar's, therefore, that work through and within these dominant structures to stir up desires within the contradictory uneasiness of these disidentifications.

[284] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 97.
[285] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 100.

Fig. 3.3. Photo taken by author at the second-annual CYBERBABES event on September 8, 2019 at Cheer Up Charlie's in Austin, TX.

Figure 3.3 illustrates the hyper-cute aesthetic that encompasses the all-consuming pinkness of her performances. With the performance of "P1nkstar!," p1nkstar and her background dancers, in tube tops and chunky sneakers, use sartorial markers of early aughts in tandem with the electronic synth-pop of this title track that toys with concepts of stardom and spectatorship. p1nkstar's sets typically begin with an upbeat song of her own, then fluctuate between various Spanish-language original works such as "Groserias." These moments of hyper-cute operate to, in her own words, "propose alternative hierarchies of

power and desire than those prescribed by hegemonic Western society."[286] Here, cuteness and teenybopper pop stardom are (re)signified through p1nksar's Latina and transfeminine subjectivity. In doing so, p1nkstar opens up the possibilities of breaking away from these repetitions of the social body through a humor and parody that does not self-seriously define itself in opposition to the mainstream circuits of desire and spectatorship but reconstitutes these references of white patriarchal heteronormativity through her specifically racialized and trans perspectives.

With reference to her previous storytelling and alignment with anti-capitalist performance art, this embodied appropriation of the teenybopper aesthetic performance can also be read as a reclamation of this figure of global capitalism and U.S. cultural imperialism. In using the framework of teenybopper popstar within a deconstructive mode of satirical performance, but also to support local community organizations and various performance artists, p1nkstar deploys a dominant cultural script implicated within systems of global capital, wealth, and celebrity to create spaces of queer and trans community; a co-production of art activism. In displacing the implied whiteness and essentialized femininity, but also the implications of commodity and corporatization, p1nkstar asserts the expression and community-building potentials of early-aughts teenybopper popular music culture. In doing so, her work displaces the regulation of patriarchal heteronormative capitalism from her specific performance of transfeminine Latina embodiment. p1nkstar's disidentification with pop stardom is therefore a tactical recognition of the discursive,

[286] "p1nkstar Is Creating Performance Art, Music, Video, QTPOC Community Building," Patreon, January 29, 2019, https://www.patreon.com/p1nkstar, emphasis placed by p1nkstar.

utopic possibilities of pop music's creative and community-building potentials, but also a tactical misrecognition, and performative subversion, of the upper-class, white, female, and hyper-commercialized assumptions of the teenybopper popstar as dominant cultural script.

In using technological affordances of her various virtual transmedia work to reformat, or (re)member, the contemporary implications of technologies of colonialist racialized gendering that speak through the marketable whiteness, cisgender, and heteronormative framework of the early-aughts popstar celebrity framework, p1nkstar illustrates a profound understanding of virtual music scene participation as a method of transmedia storytelling and local community-building. As represented by her role as co-coordinator of this CYBERBABES event, alongside fellow performance collaborators and local community organizations, this technology of U.S. music industry capitalism is torn down through the networked imagination and collective performative force of this queer and femme roster. In discussing the work of "U.S.-based Latinx queer trans femme media theorist, artist, and activist micha cárdenas," Jian Neo Chen recognizes how discursive perspectives of technology and subsequent social mobilization allows for "collaborations [that] repurpose technology through trans and queer of color, migrant, and non-Western imaginations that value collectivity and communicability."[287] It's within this transmedia performance of (re)memory of reality within imaginative utopic frameworks that p1nkstar disrupts the boundaries of past and present, local and transnational, physical and virtual through her trans* world-building. As the banner for the second annual CYBERBABES

[287] Chen, *Trans Exploits*, 128.

proclaims, "the future is pop's domain," and it is through p1nkstar's specific (re)memory that the power of that statement is fully realized.

## TRANS*CENDING CONCLUSION

In an interview with Very Famous Magazine, a kitschy wordpress site run by writers Kelsey Lawrence and Taylor (no last name provided), p1nkstar discusses her new EP *NUMER ONE HITS!* as, "I love pop because it's both very real and very fake, and very glamorous, very of the time. There's 'Connected' on the EP, and it's a ballad. It's really sincere, but it's also really processed, artificial—it's also talking about digital love and artificial intelligence and love. That's what I love about pop."[288] It is because of these dichotomous frameworks that p1nkstar's work is endlessly generative, constantly evolving, and productively futuristic. I conclude this thesis project with a chapter on p1nkstar purely because of these tensions of past and present, local and transnational, and reality and imagination that I understand to define the future potentials of this Post-Teeny scene to reformat academic understandings of popular music culture, but also to transform the contemporary landscape of digital music cultures. Writing a conclusion to this chapter, therefore, is more of a momentary placeholder of my own research of these artists as their future queer and trans* disruptions will undoubtedly continue to reshape my perspective, disrupt disciplines of thought, and present dynamic (re)memories of histories, cultures, and industries of popular music.

288 "Welcome to the p1nkstar Futurity: Meet Your New Favorite Electr0nic Popstar," Very Famous, April 10, 2020, http://veryfamousmagazine.com/p1nkstar-futurity/.

## Reflections (and Refractions) of/on Mainstream Pop Music Pasts, A Post-Teeny Present, and Queer Futures

Since COVID-19 first appeared in Wuhan, China in late 2019, it has spread across the world causing a global pandemic. As music industry revenues radically shift due to the cancellation and rescheduling of live touring aspects of the business, musicians have taken advantage of this time to test out various co-production techniques, increase their digital fan engagement practices, and host virtual hangouts and dance-parties. Of particular relevance to this thesis project, Charli XCX took to digital group meeting platform Zoom on April 6, 2020 to announce she will be producing an entirely new album as a result of the isolation measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.[289] In a video posted to Twitter later that day, Charli explains:

> For me staying positive goes hand in hand with being creative so that's why I've decided to use this isolation time to make a brand-new album from scratch. The nature of this album is going to be very indicative of the times just because I'm only going to be able to use the tools at my fingertips to make all music, all artwork, videos, everything. In that sense, it will be very DIY. I'll also be reaching out to people online to collaborative with and I'm going to keep the entire process very open so that anyone who wants to watch can, and I'll be posting demos, I'll be posting a cappellas, I'll be posting text conversations with any collaborators…I'll be filming myself in the studio, I'll be doing Zoom conference to ask fans or anyone watching for opinions or ideas. I'm going to set up an email address so that fans or anyone can send me beats or references. The whole thing in that sense will be extremely collaborative because anyone who wants to be involved can explore their creativity alongside mine…the album is called *How I'm Feeling Now.*[290]

[289] Charli XCX, Twitter Post, April 6, 2020, 12:00PM, https://twitter.com/charli_xcx/status/1247207633075023876.
[290] Charli XCX, Twitter Post, April 6, 2020, 2:11PM, https://twitter.com/charli_xcx/status/1247240506901442561.

As of April 24, 2020, Charli has released two singles, “Forever” and “Claws,” each with three different variations of cover art across various digital streaming platforms (DSPs) YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music made in collaboration with fans and fellow artists. The above quote, as well as the production processes of her recent releases, echoes various themes of this thesis project such as tensions between mainstream promotional tools and DIY ethos of production within the streaming era, the low barrier to entry for virtual participation for fans and co-producers within the work of contemporary musicians, and the networked connectivity of this music scene that transcends the limits of the physical both out of choice and necessity. Without immediate access to label executives, managers, creative directors and branding executives at various DSPs, all musicians and industry professionals are now forced to consider alternate virtual strategies of production, engagement, and collaboration that exists outside of the financial mechanisms of the music industry. Now more than ever, this music scene’s networked co-production, relative independence from the mainstream music industry, and community-based ethos presents viable and sustainable practices for the future of contemporary popular music culture.

As such, the artists mentioned throughout this thesis project have quickly adapted to the rapidly evolving shifts and limits to interactions with audiences, venues, and fellow collaborators. Rina Sawayama released her debut album, *SAWAYAMA*, as scheduled through her recent label deal with Dirty Hit Records on April 17, 2020. During what would have been a packed promotional cycle of radio interviews, photoshoots with various fashion and popular culture publications, and release parties, Sawayama and her team instead focused on interactive hashtag engagements for fans. She challenged fans to learn

the choreography from her recently released video for the song "XS," encouraged fans to send in thank you letters to their friends and family for a coordinated blogpost to promote the release of her single "Chosen Family," and hosted a virtual listening party on the day of the album's release.[291][292][293] Dorian Electra recently released a remix and accompanying music video for the 100 gecs song, "gec 2 Ü." 100 gecs, an experimental music duo consisting of Dylan Brady and Laura Les, is another facet of this larger scene. Brady co-produced Charli's new single "Claws" and hosted a virtual music festival Square Garden live on/inside the video game Minecraft on April 24, 2020 with Charli and Dorian on the lineup.[294][295] The festival streamed live on the duo's YouTube channel and their website, while any Minecraft user was able to attend the festival set in-game. p1nkstar reminded her fans of the importance of supporting local bars, venues, and nightlife employees by spotlighting various bartenders, artists, and performers on her Instagram stories. She also co-hosted Virtual Kiki, a "queerantine happy hour and gay ole virtual dance party," with Austin-based collectives and artists Lesbian Wedding, Thee Gay Agenda, Y2K Technologies, and DJ Girlfriend.[296] This focus on local community-building through digital networks, in combination with her full live-stream set for International Performance

[291] Rinasonline. Instagram Post. April 22, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/B_RwgqfA6TF/.

[292] Rinasonline. Instagram Post. April 1, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/B-biQxkgf_W/.

[293] Rinasonline. Instagram Post. April 16, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/B_C1lJ4Fw1X/.

[294] Brady, Dylan. Twitter Post. April 23, 2020, 1:38PM, https://twitter.com/dylanbrady/status/1253392926454898688.

[295] 100gecs. Instagram Post. April 16, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B_DLIB3jDi5/.

[296] Beth Sullivan, "Tonight's Virtual Kiki Fosters Queer Connection," When you can't go to the dance party, the dance party comes to you! - Qmmunity - The Austin Chronicle, March 26, 2020, https://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/qmmunity/2020-03-26/tonights-virtual-kiki-fosters-queer-connection/.

Festival Fusebox Festival on April 24, 2020, further emphasizes p1nkstar's unique negotiation of local and transnational through various strategies of connectivity.[297]

In light of an uncertain future, the artists from this Post-Teeny scene are building upon their past experiences with virtual co-production and digital fan engagement to make sense of the trauma of their present situation. Similar to their approaches to (re)memory of early-aughts teenybopper culture, temporality is a tool of the queer imagination that creates spaces of connection within and through affective networked relations inherent within pop music and performance. I do not wish to obscure the increasing precarity of these artists' livelihoods during this time of global pandemic, particularly for someone like p1nkstar whose primary income comes from live performance. Instead, I want to further emphasize the cultural value of the digital architectures of this Post-Teeny scene that, through their insistence on community-building and networked co-production, further emphasizes the necessity of their work from both an affective and industrial perspective.

My decision to conclude this project with a reflection the on the state of this music scene during this global pandemic serves multiple purposes. Personally, the affective components of this music scenes' co-production helped me find motivation and purpose during the final month of writing this thesis project. Keeping up with their creative processes, participating in virtual dance parties, and relishing in the surprise of new music and videos has further integrated the personal into my writing of this project's final chapter and conclusion. The increased time of introspection caused by isolation and social

[297] p1nkstar. Instagram Post. April 15, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B_Aoza8FIcg/.

distancing led to the realization that the affective and the personal was something that was perhaps missing from my initial survey of this Post-Teeny scene's practice. I understand this project as the beginning of my career in academia and want to take this moment to reflect on what this project means for my larger trajectory, but also to pay tribute to the ways these artists have provided me the raw material for important self-discoveries both professionally and personally. Further, as the performance practice of these artists makes visible their positionalities, intimate reflections of self, and experiences of marginalization, I use this conclusion to perform my own vulnerability in an attempt to reckon with the power dynamics inherent within scholarly interpretations of these queer and trans lives. Inspired by queer theory's insistence that the personal is political and wanting to make tangible my intense admiration for the artists discussed in this project, these final pages unpack the intertwined temporalities of my relationship to mainstream commercial pop music, my scholarly perspective, and the generative work of these pop music philosophers.

Further, I wish to tease out the multiple meanings of reflection as both a personal retelling, but also within the term's relationship to light and sound. In drawing these parallels, I place this thesis, these music and performance artists, and the work of my academic idols within the metaphorical juxtapositions of reflection and refraction to pay homage to the queer sonic disruptions of Post-Teeny (re)memory. Operating through soundwaves, the work of this group does not merely produce a reflection of or on the sounds of the past, yet offers a *refraction* of these previous influences that produces different speeds, directions, and densities through sonic distortions. The prismatic productions of Post-Teeny refractions work through assumptions of reflection up until the

point of contact. Through a clash of disjunctive soundwaves, refractions queerly disrupt the assumed linearity of reflections to produce new distortions of sound. Whereas appreciation for the hyper-feminine power of mainstream pop music past is reflected in the performance practice of these Post-Teeny appropriations of early aughts sound and aesthetics, the inherent queer sensibility and positionality of this scene refracts these previous influences to produce generative distortions packed with the momentum of future potentialities. The literal distortions, or refractions, of this Post-Teeny sound therefore speak to the larger disruptions that this Post-Teeny scene poses to previous popular music industry exclusions, contemporary popular music scholarship, and the futures of popular music culture. This reflection on my past, present, and future in relationship to the work of this Post-Teeny scene further emphasizes the refractive potentialities of our continued collaboration of performance and scholarship.

This thesis project is ultimately a larger reflection/refraction on the role that mainstream pop music has played in my life. As a little girlyboy during the early-aughts, pop music operated as an endlessly utopic and immersive world of cross-gender identification.[298] Performing numbers in my bedroom created a world of being that was not permitted in other, more public, facets of my life. Every object of my childhood investment was connected to the affective power of mainstream popular music. My Barbie doll of Rizzo, dressed in her iconic pencil skirt and Pink Lady jacket from the movie-musical *Grease* (1978), prompted daily bedroom performances of "There are Worse Things I Could

[298] My use of girlyboy here is both an accurate description of my dual gender identification as a child and also a nod to the opening of Curran Nault's "Girlyboys on Film: Queering the Frame(s)" of which this personal approach takes inspiration.

Do." An obsession with my plush toy of Mulan, whose climactic emotional song "Reflection," led to a discovery of Christina Aguilera's discography due to her promotional cover for the movie's soundtrack. Daily perusals of my mom's coveted collection of romantic comedy soundtracks, such as *How to Lose A Guy In 10 Days* (2003) and *Coyote Ugly* (2000), created my adolescent taste profile that, to this day, inflects my contemporary appreciation of this music scene. These objects, compounded with my pirated iTunes music library of The Cheetah Girls, Britney Spears, and Shania Twain, soon become a private and shameful world of unabashed femininity that I would deny to any outside observer. The (re)memory of early-aughts cisgender heteronormative femininity, and its accompanying pop soundtrack, deeply resonates with my personal understandings of the power of pop music to create a new world of nonnormative gender expression. Similar to the work of these Post-Teeny artist, I understood bedroom performance practices as reflecting the power and agency of hyper-feminine pop music, yet the heteronormative constructs of mainstream promotional logics prevented a mutual reflection of my gender or sexual identity. This thesis project, therefore, can also be read as a deeply personal reflection of my admiration for a pop music past that provided me critical spaces of femininized imagination and expression that is only brought to the present by the embodied performative refractions of these Post-Teeny artists.

Skipping ahead to sitting in my studio apartment, writing the latter sections of this project during a global pandemic, the intellectual imaginations of both the artists and scholars cited throughout this thesis made dealing with the present situation less difficult. Getting lost in mid-day dance parties and spouts of personal reflection as I blare Rina

Sawayama's new album, rummaging through Dorian Electra's vast library of music videos to feel a much-need rush of energetic adrenaline, and admiring p1nkstar's insistence on amplifying the work and voices of her fellow community during an increased time of uncertainty for service workers and performance artists further emphasized the personal, intellectual, and scholarly connection that I've fostered with these artists during the writing process. The work of these artists also created the raw material that prompted a deeper dive into the work of some of my scholarly idols such as Jodie Taylor, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz. Taylor's *Playing it Queer* reassured my initial line of thought at the early stages of this project and it is because of her call-to-action for further queer exploration into music scenes that this project exists. Halberstam's understanding of queer temporality and spatiality within the theoretical frameworks of *In a Queer Time and Place* taught me to question linearity in any form, a discursive tool of queer sensibility and making sense of the world that I will carry with me for a lifetime. Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* allowed me the space to realize utopia is not unilaterally conceived through meditations on the positive aspects of life but is rather produced through feelings of loss, experiences of marginality, and a necessity for survival. Lastly and most significantly, Muñoz's *Disidentifications* taught me that queer scholarship can be as humorous as it is urgent, as personal as it is political, and as radically deconstructive as it is imaginatively creative. Inspired by these scholar's refraction of the various privileges and hierarchies of academia to produce value through and within queer and trans performance, this project is indebted to the deeply influential intellectual work of both these theorist and pop music philosophers that created the performative and academic spaces for this thesis to reflect upon.

Looking towards the future, I understand this thesis project as the beginning of a much larger and more immersed mapping of this music scene. The teenybopper scope and framework of (re)memory does inform the bubblegum pop orientation of most of the artists unmentioned in this project, however, there are other genres such as rap, R&B, and electronic music that are excluded from this initial survey. Future approaches to this topic and scene will widen the genre demarcations of the scope of this project to examine the ways other artists similarly and contrastingly contribute to this scene's shared networked connectivity and virtual community-building. Methodologically, future explorations should also give more attention to the broad network of actors within this scene such as the club and concert promoters, venue owners, nightlife entertainers, music and video producers, and fans that very much affect the performance practice of these music and performance artists. The ambitious scope and argument of this networked connectivity would also benefit from further connections to the previous histories of DIY practice, as well as more nuanced understandings of the ways industry enables and constrains these independent artists.

Writing a conclusion through a reflection on the role of temporality within this project, these artists, and my life, therefore, seems almost counterintuitive. While the digital file of this thesis will exist on a university library server, a marker of its completion by the institution, my academic attention to and deep admiration of these artists is far from finalized. Here, the futurist orientation of this project speaks through the futurities of these artists and it is largely because of their work that I have a future in academia. My past, their present, and *our* future hopefully points to and reflects new directions in scholarship,

collaboration, and disruption that works to reconstitute and refract the outdated value-laden exclusions of both our spaces of work; the academy and mainstream popular music culture.

These moments of past, present, and future are all intertwined. The juxtaposed feelings of absence and euphoria that structured my past with mainstream pop music are only made coherent through understanding the ways that my imagination of a better future operated within these moments of exploration. My present conceptualization of self is a rationalization of my past and my future and it is because of queer artistic practice, queer temporality, queer modes consumption, and queer scholarship that these disparate moments of time become interwoven through a disjunctive patchwork of positionality. Similarly, this project has attempted to do right by the artists discussed to illustrate their collective and individual power to reformat the past futures, the present futures, and the future futures of popular music culture. Therefore, the necessary linear structure of this thesis as beginning with the (re)memory of pop music's *past* in chapter one, the strategic practices of Sawayama's branded (re)memory in *present* popular press coverage in chapter two, and the innovative and networked connectivity of p1nkstar's *futurity* in chapter three almost negates the cyclical nature of these artist's performance and storytelling practices. To counteract this assumed linearity, I offer interwoven tensions between physical place and representational space, epistemological ruptures of modernist hierarchies of taste-value and queerly postmodern pop music egalitarianism, as well as nuanced contrasts between these artists' lived reality and performative imaginations. Futurity in this sense is past, present, and future tense as the imaginative capacities of queerness breaks us from these temporal regulations of heteronormative life narratives and opens the possibilities of

transgressions of space, discipline of thought, and boundaries of embodiment. It is through this project that I pay homage to queer reflections on pop music's past, the refractive innovations of Post-Teeny's queer and trans* networked present, and the combined future prismatic potential of queer performance, scholarship, and community.

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